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OUIDA'S LOVE; OR, FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION.

BY HENRIETTA E. DE CONDE.



ERNEST DIVESTED HIMSELF OF GUN AND HUNTING TACKLE AND THREW HIMSELF UPON THE GRASS AT HER FEET.

OUIDA'S LOVE;

OR,
From Generation to Generation.

BY HENRIETTA E. DE CONDE.

CHAPTER I.

THE MILLER'S DAUGHTER.

"For I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, and visit the sins of the father upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation."

A BRIGHT summer sun streamed in at the window of a picturesque old mill-house situated in one of the many lovely ravines running back from

"The vale where the Mohawk gently glides
On its clear winding way to the sea,"

and strove in vain to brighten the face of a slight, pale woman sitting near the lattice.

An atmosphere of perpetual sadness, despite the dancing sunlight, and the cheery song of birds that made the homely little front room an echoing paradise of sweet sounds, enveloped the black-robed figure. A piece of sewing lay across the lady's lap; but her long, transparent fingers toyed idly with the needle, and her eyes rested tenderly yet sadly, upon a young girl who stood, with arms bared above the dimpled elbows, washing dishes at a little square table standing, upon angular legs, primly in the center of the room.

Mother and daughter, one would pronounce these two at a glance, although the creamy pallor of the mother's face, framed in waving bands of chestnut hair, reminded one of a stately Calla-lily growing beneath the brown shadows of some woody trellis; and the daughter bloomed in youthful freshness like some newly blossomed English rose.

In spite of their rude surroundings and humble employment, there was that in the appearance of both parent and child that would fix the attention of people less given to building air-castles than a romancist; and even the unworld-wise inhabitants of Glenville found much in the family of the miller upon which to found extravagant conjectures.

"True, no fault could be found with them; for Hugh Haughton kept the peace and fattened five hogs at the expense of his customers, and his wife was ever quiet, amiable and lady-like, while winsome Ouida reigned queen of every youthful heart, both boy and girl, within a day's ride of the mill. But they had not always lived there, and in a neighborhood where every family record can be proved from the beginning of time, by some of the oldest inhabitants, this is an indication of a lack of consideration in one's ancestors which the descendants of the early settlers are very loth to overlook.

More than this, the miller was a singularly reserved and eccentric man, who never mingled with those about him, but lived solitary, amid the dust and roar of the busy mill.

Mrs. Haughton, although friendly disposed toward her neighbors, could never quite assimilate with the buxom, bustling dames that constituted the society of the country; and so her manners, that were but the reflection of natural dignity and refined intelligence, were, by these critical rustics, pronounced "stuck up," and she was to a certain extent left alone to nurse the melancholia that seemed to have fastened upon her life and sucked it barren of smiles.

And Ouida, notwithstanding that, in her irrepressible joyousness, she was the life of every gathering, she still was like some lovely exotic, growing upon a daisy-starred bank, among her youthful companions. Nature had made a difference between her and the maidens with whom she romped, and that this difference was felt, was proved by the fact that while she had ever had a miniature court about her, still none of the farmer lads ever paid her those pointed and nameless attentions by which they indicate their preference for the particular Phyllis that desire elects wife of the future man.

Then, too, there were things at the mill-

house not to be found in any other mill-house in Central New York. On one side of the room into which we have looked, and which served both as parlor and living room, was a set of plainly constructed shelves filled with methodically arranged and elegantly bound books—books that, by their titles, proved themselves selections from the choicest literature of every nation. Between the window and outer door stood a claw-footed mahogany *beaufet*, black with age; and upon a curiously twisted music-rack of the same dark wood stood a beautifully inlaid guitar case. Facing the book-shelves, on the opposite side of the room stood a huge cedar chest, rich with antique carving, above which hung a masterly painting in oil, representing Cain at the moment when the Lord said unto him, "Where is Abel, thy brother?" while about the room were scattered various little womanly trinkets very rarely to be met with in the rural homes of America, even in the year of our Lord, 18—

But on this particular morning of which I write, the little table with its decided square, where Ouida stood elbow deep in a shining tin pan of steaming water, was covered with the most incongruous of all the miller's possessions, namely—a full coffee service of quaintly fashioned silver, flanked by piles of plates, cups and saucers of the rarest Sevres china.

"What is this in the center of these plates, mother?" asked Ouida, as she wiped one deftly with a snowy linen towel and deposited it carefully upon one of the shelves of the old *beaufet*.

"A coat-of-arms, daughter," answered the mother, somewhat wearily, as if she would thus dismiss the subject.

"The silver is marked in just the same way. I should think they might have found something prettier to put on. What is a coat-of-arms?" persisted the girl.

"It is, I think, a kind of patent of nobility held by families of noble descent, and granted by royalty at the conferring of a title in recognition of brave deeds," was the hesitating reply.

"What does this lion rearing up as if to climb an oak tree signify? and here are some words in Latin, what do they mean?"

"The arms was granted to John Ogden, Esq., by Charles the Second, who saved the life of his unfortunate father, Charles the First, by telling him to secrete himself in the thick branches of an oak-tree when so closely pressed by his enemies that escape seemed impossible. The king followed the advice and Ogden rode on, closely pursued by those who thought him in company with Charles, and the royal fugitive escaped. The lion represents the person of the king, and the tree his leafy hiding-place.

The words are a Latin motto, '*Et si ostendo non jacto*—the motto of the house of Ogden, meaning—'And if I make a show I do not boast.'

"Well! how came that coat-of-arms upon this silver, or, how came we by silver bearing that coat-of-arms?"

"Your father's mother was an Ogden, and these things belonged to her."

"Did she live in England, and is she dead?—Did I have a grandfather, or an uncle, or some relations besides a grandmother, like other girls have?—Why don't you tell me all about it?—Where did we live before we came here?" asked the girl, eagerly, unmindful of her mother's gentle "hush," or the passing shadow that threw a momentary gloom in at the open window.

But, the impetuous words died suddenly on her lips as she caught sight of the miller's form as it darkened the doorway and knew that he had heard her questions.

The man's clothes were white with the sifting particles of grain, and the rings of his coal-black hair were powdered thickly with the same gray dust, and, yet, the badges of his humble calling set upon him, like the trappings of a masquerade, as he stood blurring the sunshine with his dark and haughty presence. A white anger circled his thin lips, and a phosphorean flame shot from his eyes as he bent

their glance upon the blanching face of his wife and asked, with a sneer:—"Why don't you enlighten your daughter, madame? You have an interesting bit of family history in your memory!"

"We were only talking about the coat-of-arms upon the old service, Hugh!" said the shrinking woman, pleadingly.

"Curse the old service! I'll grind it into powder, beneath my heel, if I hear any more of this curiosity," hissed the man, and turning abruptly left the room.

Only the ticking of the tall old clock broke the silence that violence and tyranny had so suddenly created. A mute anguish overspread Mrs. Haughton's face, while Ouida stood, the picture of consternation, with frightened roses trembling from red to pale in cheek and brow. Slowly she freed her hands from the crystal water-drops, and as slowly passing to where her mother sat, she wiped away the two great tears that were just escaping the tortured eyelids, then turning her quick, passionate face toward the door, she asked:

"Why is father always so angry when I seek to know from whence we came, and from whom we are descended? What is there so terrible in the past that makes him rage like a tiger, and has made you old before your time?"

"Don't ask me, child! Don't ask me! Pray to God, hourly, that you may never know. I, your mother, could wish you had died an innocent babe, in my arms, rather than to see you bearing the burden I have borne. I can see nothing in the future for you that is good. There—there! Forget all this, darling; I am not quite myself to-day. Don't grieve, Ouida, nor mind these little differences between your father and me. Put on your bonnet and take a walk down to your favorite butternut-tree; the air and sunshine will do you good."

"But, mother, I cannot bear to see you unhappy and fading away like a snow-wreath. Is there nothing I can do to give you joy and peace?"

"Nothing, daughter, beyond the comfort your bright young life is to me. Ask me no more questions concerning the past; it but disturbs a current we cannot stem. Finish your work, my love, and then go out; I would be alone."

A few moments were occupied in placing the dishes in their accustomed places, and covering the angular table with an embroidered spread; then the house-door opened and shut between the young heart going out to meet its fate, and the stricken mourner into whose soul the iron had long since entered, and none but the God, whose mighty finger is upon the pulse of humanity, felt the throb of that mother's voiceless prayer as she knelt by the vine-wreathed window.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH YOUNG LOVE AND "THIS WORLD'S POLLY" APPEAR.

"Rosy in the west,
Rosy in the south,
Roses are her cheeks,
And a rose her mouth."

* * * * *

"For a breeze of morning moves
And the planet of Love is on high."

OUIDA HAUGHTON was very fair to look upon as she walked beneath the shadow of the graceful willows that skirted the swift-running mill-stream down toward her favorite haunt, the old butternut tree. The summer wind played hide-and-go-seek in the waving masses of her bronze-gold hair, and gauzy-winged insects played envious pranks in the muslin folds that veiled so tenderly the soft warm loveliness of neck and arms. Her eyes were violet-blue, fringed by long curling lashes; her forehead white and wide and high; one roguish dimple nestled in the round left cheek; her chin was short and sensitive; her nose small, straight and delicate of nostril, and her mouth formed a Cupid's bow so tempting that—

"A man had given all other bliss,
And all his worldly worth for this—
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips."

A searcher for sangre azul would have found its warranty in the tiny shell-tinted ear, the exquisitely molded hands with their pointed pink nails, and the high arched instep of her little feet as they pressed daintily the springing grasses, and have been confounded in his theory by learning that the little lady was only a miller's daughter.

But, Ouida was not given to theorems; she could put two and two together, but she was not fond of working out these little problems. Moreover, Ouida was young, and the air was sweet with the breath of honeysuckles and wild-roses; a saucy bobolink whistled merrily at her from some invisible perch in the willow copse, and great lazy butterflies floated like animate flowers upon the languid breeze. Who could long be sad or long remember unpleasant things beguiled by nature's great harmonies?

The old butternut was a glorious tree. Its thick-leaved arms stretched wide, projecting shadows over the cool greensward at its roots; feathered minstrels of every note held tuneful rehearsals within the leafy orchestra. The silvery Mourning Kill glided over its pebbly bed under the dancing reflection of its wind-tossed boughs, and sitting there beneath its friendly shade one might see and hear the music of the falls, as spouting from the cliff the liquid element breaks into foamy spray, then, escaping the rocky torture, gathers again its shining thread and flashes adown the mossy banks. Above is the deep blue of the rippleless pond merging into the fainter blue of the cloudless sky, and the white sails of the old mill gleam restless through the parting trees.

A cuckoo greeted Ouida with its changeeful midsummer note as she stood drinking in with her eyes the evervarying, neverfailing charms of her vantage ground.

"A cuckoo! I'll try my fortune,"* said she to herself. "I'm sixteen, and 'Heartsease' was 'Wooded and married and a' before her sixteenth birthday.

*In many parts of the north of England the old Danish superstition still prevails of the village girls going out on the midsummer morning, when the cuckoo changes the note which it has maintained since April, to question the bird as to their future marriage. According to this ancient custom, the simple maidens kiss their hands in salutation to the mysterious little soothsayer of the meadows, and say each in turn:

"Cuckoo! cuckoo!
How d'you do? How d'you do?
How long must I tarry
Before I marry?"

The bird, replying, sings out "Cuckoo" as many times as months (not years, it is to be hoped,) will elapse before the wished-for event is to come off.

"Cuckoo! cuckoo!
How d'you do? How d'you do?
How long must I tarry,
Before I marry?"

repeated she in mock demure tones.

"Cuckoo! cuckoo! cuckoo!" came from some wild-wood covert in answer to the half-roguish, half-serious appeal.

"Only three months to tarry! Oh, wicked cuckoo! what sort of a wedding-dress should a girl be able to make in that time!

"I'm o'er young, I'm o'er young,
I'm o'er young to marry yet;
I'm o'er young, 'twad be a sin
To tak' me frae my mither yet,"

she sung in her sweet, clear voice, and the woody hills rung back a warning echo, "O'er young."

"Bravo! bravo!" came in fresh, manly tones from the other side of the creek.

The conscious blood rushed up to the very edges of the fair young singer's sun-gold hair, and a sudden silence more eloquent than words fell upon her.

The speaker sprang lightly across the fallen willow that formed a natural, though half-submerged bridge over the stream, and came toward the maiden.

Dressed in hunting costume, as he stood, tall and straight in the glinting sunlight, no son of Nimrod ever more nearly approached the fabled beauty of the god. He was a Saul among men in stature and perfectness of limb, and his features were regular as chiseled marble

and well-nigh as clear and pale; his mouth and nose were finely-cut, proud and firm; the lines of the lips exceedingly delicate and haughty; his eyes were dark and wonderfully deep with powers of expression; his brow was wide, high and powerful, and his head was set as grandly as the head of a youthful Titan upon his shoulders.

"Ernest!" shyly uttered the blushing girl.

"At your service, fair Ouida. I know it is a great breach of etiquette to intrude upon a lady's retirement, but how could you expect me to remain in the woods when even the meadow-larks left their strawberry depredations at the sound of your voice?" said the young giant, as he divested himself of gun and hunting-tackle and threw himself upon the grass at her feet.

"Were you listening? Did you hear me—"

"Sing? Most certainly! How could I help it, and how else should I have known you were here?" interrupted, and, after the manner of Yankees, answered the youth, drawing in long breaths of the cool, delicious breeze.

"How else, to be sure? Well, people who stroll all over are pretty sure to hear something not intended for their ears. What have you shot to-day?"

"Powder," was the sententious reply. "Is not this a picture-spot on earth's broad canvas?"

"It seems to me as if there are none more beautiful," answers Ouida, with dewy eyes. "Here are the violets dim, but sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses, golden oxlips, and the crown imperial; blue-eyed myrtles and fragrant fleur-de-lis. I gathered them as I came and find them sweetest as they die."

"And are you Perdita? You reminded me irresistibly of her as I saw you sitting here with your lap full of fragrance. But no; I will not call you Perdita," and a tender light beamed from the young man's eye as he watched the carmine come and go beneath the rose-leaf whiteness of her transparent cheek.

"Then you do not consider me 'the queen of curds and cream?'" she said, with all a woman's coquettish instincts alive within her, and a telling side-glance from her innocent blue orbs.

"You are 'no shepherdess, but Flora peering in April's front.' I will not call you Perdita, for that means lost."

"And, as I am 'no shepherdess,' you will not connect me with the lost sheep."

"Not unless you will consider me the shepherd who is to bring you into his fold."

"I think we are talking nonsense," said Ouida, half-frightened at the turn the conversation had taken and at loss how to meet his most pointed remark.

"People who are in love seldom talk anything else," answered the handsome fellow.

"But, I am not in love," hesitatingly floundered she, while the rich red suffused neck and brow.

"But I am!" with earnest emphasis.

"With yourself?" asked the shy little puss.

"With my other self," was the answer, with increasing warmth.

"Oh! Then you have a double! With which have I the honor of speaking?"

"With the real Ernest—the Ernest who loves you and who wants to call you by the holiest of all names. Will you be mine?"

One little moment the wide pansy eyes searched his face as if to read there the truth of his words, and then the rare sweet face hid itself upon his breast and the sweetest silence in God's fair world fell upon them.

Afar the tinkling of a cowbell mingled with the voices of laughing children; the honey-laden bee droned by on tireless wing; a great yellow bumble-bee payed gallant court to an oxeyed daisy; the cuckoo cooed softly from its verdant hiding, and the Mourning Kill rippled gently on its way to its lover's arms, the bright old Mohawk; but the young hearts, wrapped in sweet love's dream, only felt the unwritten harmonies of nature's sympathies and found a foretaste of Heaven upon each other's lips.

"Will you walk into my parlor?" said a spider to a fly;
'Tis the prettiest little parlor that ever you did spy.
You've only got to pop your head within the little door
To see so many curious things you never saw before.
Will you, will you, will you, will you, walk in, pretty fly?"

sung a little crickery-crockery voice close at hand.

The young couple started, blushing each furiously, and Ernest asked:

"Who is that?"

"This world's Polly," answered Ouida.

"Who is 'this world's Polly?'"

"A poor demented creature who lives in that little hut just there in that clump of willows."

The explanation was hardly given when a singular figure came along the grass-grown path toward them. She was dressed in some kind of a dust-colored petticoat, over which she wore a long-tailed-blue dress coat in a poor state of preservation. Her long white hair covered her like a veil, and in her hand she carried a pug-nosed, broken-handled, shiny-black teapot.

"Good-morning, young Colin and Dowsabel," she said, dropping them an elaborate courtesy. "I never expected to see another pair of lovers in *this world*, no never. I hain't seen any before since Methuselah was a small boy and bought me taffy by the yard, and I don't expect to see another till the dying day of my death. I don't suppose there'll ever be another such proposal as Solomon made to the Queen of Sheba in *this world*, no never, and—

The little maid replied;

Some say, a little sighed;

But, what shall we have for to eat, eat, eat?

Will the love that you're so rich in

Make a fire in the kitchen—

Or the little god of love turn the spit, spit, spit?"

And that makes me think that Methuselah is waiting for his supper—a thing he never done before in *this world*, no never! 'and when he came there the cupboard was bare' and I'll never forget it till the dying day of my death, no, no, never! Good-morning, young Colin and fair Dowsabel!" and with another bobbing courtesy she hobbled on, singing as she went,

"Then up he springs but both his wings
Were in the web caught fast;
The spider laughs, 'Ha, ha, my boy,
I've caught you safe at last!
Will you, will you, will you, will you walk
out, pretty fly?"

"Well, if a man did not care what he said, he might pronounce that one of the greatest curiosities in *this world*," said Ernest, following the grotesque receding figure with his eyes.

"Polly is indeed a curiosity, but I sometimes think there is 'method in her madness.' However rambling her discourse, there is always a certain applicability about it that makes one feel uncomfortable," answered his companion.

"I hope you are not thinking of 'the Spider and the Fly,' little girl! I should not feel at all flattered to know myself associated in your mind with those horrid black bugs."

"Indeed no! Polly's warbling did strike me with a certain force at the moment, but my natural vanity came to the rescue."

"Then you would not wish to be considered a 'foolish little fly?'"

"What woman would? Besides I am not partial to spiders. They may be companionable during solitary confinement, but I could not find in them any suggestion of matrimonial affinities. I was thinking that Polly addressed us as Colin and Dowsabel. Did you notice it?"

"Yes; she doubtless thought this a bank whereon the pastoral twain might sit flirting and weaving

—Belts of straw and ivy buds,

and simpering at each other over the tops of their crooks. Polly has evidently been a reader at some period of her existence. But, to change the subject: what has been vexing you? You were singing when I discovered you, yet I fancied that the skyey blue of your eyes was humid as if with recent showers."

"Nothing, Ernest," answered the girl, while a tremulous sadness usurped the usual animated glow of her countenance.

"Ah, I am not to be put off that way," said her lover, while the latent persistence in his character slightly contracted the muscles about his mouth. "I'm not to be put off that way. A woman's 'nothing' is frequently more than a man's loudest 'everything.' If I am to be keeper of your conscience I insist upon a full confession. Begin now, pet."

"Well, at least it is nothing more tangible than a skeleton in the closet," sighed Ouida, in reluctant tones.

"What manner of skeleton is it, dear? I have a taste for wiring those things."

"It is the skeleton of my grandmother," was the grave rejoinder.

A prolonged whistle was the only response to this rather startling announcement, and she continued:

"You perhaps know that we have many things at the Mill-house unlike the possessions of our neighbors. Among them there is a set of old china and several pieces of silver curiously marked that once belonged to grandmother. To-day, while washing these dishes, I asked mother some questions concerning them which father happened to overhear, and it put him into a terrible rage."

"An aggravated case of mother-in-law, very likely."

"No, it cannot be that, because it is not the grandmother upon the distaff side. Don't laugh at me, Ernest, for I am very sensitive concerning the mystery that envelops our past. That we have not always occupied the position in life we now do I feel certain, for where will you find a miller born to the wright with a classical education like my father, or a miller's wife accomplished in music and art, who speaks with ease three or four languages, as does my mother?"

"There is something in that; but 'what is Hecuba to us or we to Hecuba?'"

"Nothing to-day, perhaps, but Hecuba may prove everything to us in the future fulfillment of present hopes."

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," my darling. We have a cross ready at hand without borrowing trouble of the future."

"What is it?" asked the girl, with a startled look leaping into her wide, clear eyes, as she involuntarily nestled closer to the young man's side.

"I am going away to-morrow."

"Going away?"

"Yes, going away. Shall you miss me, or will absence teach you to forget?"

"Forgetfulness never comes to love, Ernest. How can I help but miss you? It is the one left who is soonest forgotten, not the one who goes. Women's hearts are as wax to receive impressions and as marble to retain them, but I read in one of father's books that—

'Men were deceivers ever;
One foot on land and one on sea;
To one thing constant never.'"

"Ah, my dear, that may have been very true of the men of whom Shakspeare wrote, but it can never be true of a man who really loves. Men sometimes cloak falsehood with love's habit, and thus a true man's heart is shamed by the onus of knavish pretensions. That I am true I will prove to you by love's unfailing test—fidelity," said the young man, earnestly.

"I did but jest, Ernest. I could not doubt you. How long shall you be away?"

"Three months."

"Three months!"

"Yes, love. It seems an eternity, but I must prepare my father for a daughter's love, and a cage for my bonnie bird."

"I shall count the days but as they hasten your return."

"And I shall think and dream only of the day that is to make you mine."

"Shall we say good-by, here now?"

"Not good-by, but adieu, for I go to return again."

One close embrace—one kiss, long and sweet

as that of Coriolanus, and then a hunter clad in Lincoln green re-crossed the rustic willow bridge, and a maiden lay, face downward, amid the fragrant clover blossoms, lost in passionate thought. Rippling water, caroling birds and murmuring foliage all moved in tender sympathy, yet an hour knit itself into the unraveled sleeve of time ere the fair young face was lifted from among the fresh cool grasses.

"Oh, strange, sweet power of love, that makes the child a woman before the golden dawn is brushed from childhood's innocence!" soliloquized Ouida, tying the strings of her rice straw hat with its nodding corn flowers beneath her rounded chin, and gathering her scattered flowers into odorous sheaves. "In the shadow of this old tree I played at keeping house, with bits of bark for tea-things, and a row of crook-necked squashes for my children. Later on I dreamed of Ariel and Puck, Peas-blossom and Cobweb, who 'pluck the wings from painted butterflies,' and 'kill canker in the musk-rose buds.' Here I kissed each flower as it opened its eyes to the morning sun, and believed a fairy Mab or a goblin would hear my whispers to the blossoms. Here, too, I sobbed away my childish griefs, indulged my girlish fancies, built my castles in Spain, and won my woman's birthright. Ah, cuckoo, thou wert no false prophet!"

Thus apostrophized, the cuckoo's plaintive cry again cleft the languid summer air as if it were an answering voice, and turning her face toward the Mill-house, Ouida walked slowly away from the trysting-tree, ever and anon echoing the note of the invisible bird in the refrain of this sweet old song:

"Deep in the forest's heart a voice
Is calling all day long;
No bird you see on any tree,
But still you hear that song;
As onward through the wood you go,
It leads you singing soft and low,
Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo!"

"At noon the forest dells are bright
With slanting beams of gold,
At eve the dim and dewy air
The growing shades unfold;
But morn and eve, repeated slow,
The voice is calling, soft and low,
Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo!"

"The pine is fragrant under foot,
And sweet the spicy air,
But still that distant voice allures
To seek it everywhere;
Now louder, then far-off and low,
What means it, ever calling so,
Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo!"

"Still distant and unseen, the voice
Some happy spirit seems,
That beckons us to fairyland,
Whose realms we see in dreams;
Where never mortal steps may go,
Unless it leads them, calling so,
Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo!"

"It is the spirit of the woods,
That sings in happy rest,
Such quiet and contented notes
As suits the forest best;
Its peaceful shades no sound should know
But that sweet sound so soft and low,
Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo!"

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE OF CASTLEMAYNE.

As the tamer of wild beasts lays his head with rash confidence between the lion's jaws, so had Ouida Haughton given the holy fragrance of her white young life into the keeping of a man of whom she knew little besides his name and that he was her lover.

If ever man was loved unselfishly that man was Ernest Castlemayne, although there was much in his position to tempt a woman's heart, had Ouida known it.

But if there was much to tempt there was also much to warn in the history of the Castlemaynes; for there was an heirloom in the family that had proved a lion's jaw in crushing the hearts of many a fond wife and sweet-heart in the years that had—

"Rolled down the ringing grooves of time," and that heirloom was fierce, unreasoning jealousy.

Since the first Castlemayne had left the mother country and reared his "Lares and Penates" in New England, the family record

had shown only this one scar, and the world gave them absolution for the one fault that was counterbalanced by every other virtue to which successful man is heir. And the world could well afford to be thus magnanimous, because the world had nothing to fear from the green-eyed monster, and profited much by the free-handed generosity of its keepers; but it was the fair young brides that came to the graystone castle who faded and died inhaling this deadly nightshade of love.

Girard Castlemayne, the founder of the American branch of the family, had built his home in the forest center of an Eastern State. Hundreds and hundreds of acres of fertile unclaimed land stretched out around him, and though Indians and wild beasts contested every foot of his chosen ground with him, he was nothing daunted and began what seemed then a wild and adventurous work.

But Girard had set himself to the task of working through the mountain called Difficulty; he had faith considerably larger than a grain of mustard seed, and that, with perseverance to the fore, worked wonders. A few years joined hands with the eternity of the past, and they who had laughed loudest at what they termed the Englishman's foolhardy undertaking were loudest in their outspoken admiration of the bold, enterprising spirit that had reared a granite stronghold in the midst of a wilderness, and was rapidly cutting his way to the very heart of the primeval woods, and chinking the golden guineas into the canvas bags that lined his strong-box.

A city had now crept up to the very door of the old stone mansion, and although the descendants of the indomitable pioneer built palace after palace in the city streets, they still dwelt within the moss-grown ivy-mantled walls that had withstood the besieger's hand and the ravages of time.

The Castlemaynes were a race of giants famed for beauty of physique and integrity of character, but they were also known to be passionate and stern in their resentments. Every year had marked the increase of their moneys and estates, but every year death had lopped off branches from the fine old lineal tree—no male heir of the house grew to man's estate under the softening influence of a mother's smile, it was said, and at the time of which I write there were only two living representatives of the long descended line—our hero, Ernest, and his father.

The present head of the Castlemayne family had worthily perpetuated the family wealth, the family honor and the family jealousy, and he now felt that there was but one duty undischarged, and that was to insure the perpetuation of the family name by the marriage of his son.

And here the old gentleman was in danger of falling between two stools. He was morbidly afraid that his son might entail the family acres upon a posterity of dwarfs instead of the truly begotten giants Antinous, by marriage with some one not quite his equal socially, mentally or physically; or else that he might not marry at all, and so, the race dying out with him, the ancestral possessions should fall piecemeal into the mouths of the dogs that now fattened upon the crumbs falling from his table.

These considerations had been kept carefully in view in the rearing and education of the son and heir, and as everything suggestive of Holland and the Dutch was the especial abomination of both father and son, the Union College in old Dorup was selected as the most unlikely location of all kindred institutions to contain anything dangerous to the family hope, and the young gentleman was packed off to finish his education in that phlegmatic Germanesque atmosphere, while the father drank his old port and took his after-dinner nap with happy confidence in such local protectives as Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

But, "*L'homme propose et Dieu dispose*," and fancied security often overreaches itself!

Ernest having received a diploma from his *alma mater*, and being somewhat enervated by close application, was directed by his maneuver-

ing parent to spend some little time recuperating in the salubrious safety of the Mohawk valley before returning to his native city, and after six weeks of rustication among the Glenville hills we find him, unmindful of every consideration of pride or position, avowing a man's loyal love for the miller's daughter and asking her to become his wife.

Ah, well hath the great one said:

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends
Rough hew them as we will."

Truth to tell, Ernest was not so confident in respect to the coming issue between himself and father when he started upon his homeward journey, as when in the proud elation of triumphant love he pressed the farewell kiss upon the sweet young lips of his betrothed. But, determination lurked in every curve of his mobile countenance, and though his father had

"An eye like Mars', to threaten and command," Ernest was a true chip of the Castlemayne block, with a will that an avalanche of opposition might stimulate to Herculean deeds but could never break nor bend.

CHAPTER IV.

SUNSHINE, THEN STORM.

"The ample propositions that hope makes,
In all designs begun on earth below,
Fail in the promised largeness; check and disasters
Grow in the veins of actions highest reared."

THREE times the moon had hung full over the old butternut tree and saw itself reflected in the deep pure eyes of pond and mill-stream. Three months and a day had passed since Ouida plighted her troth and parted from her lover, and now she awaits his return to keep their tryst where

"The checkered earth seems restless as a flood
Brushed by the wind. So sportive is the light
Shot through the boughs, it dances as they dance—
Shadows and sunshine intermingling quick,
And darkening and enlight'ning—as the leaves
Play wanton—every moment, every spot."

The russet brown of early autumn had touched lightly the grassy slopes. Here and there a royal gleam of crimson-and-gold made a banner of color against the dark-green background of the distant wood, and a little chill as of coming frosts lurked in the fresh, exhilarating breeze.

A heavy-winged bee buzzed in and out a late but fainting bunch of crimson clover-heads, busily conscious that the honey-harvest was nearly over. Fleecy clouds looking like great birds,

"—On tip-toe for a flight,

With wings of delicate flush, o'er virgin white," flew southward, driven before trooping gray-wrapped precursors of coming gloom—a little brown bird feasted daintily and industriously in the thorn-apple hedge, and on the distant hill, where the public road wound like a narrow, dusty ribbon around its brow, a yoke of meek-eyed oxen dragged patiently a creaking cart, loaded with ricks of yellow corn piled atop of round, ripe, golden pumpkins.

The fallen willow across the Mourning Kill groaned as if with sudden weight, and the warm red paled in the watcher's cheek. One moment in which the pulsing blood left a cool faintness on breast and brow and the heart forgot to beat its joy, and then eager hands clasped hers in greeting, eager lips sought hers for kisses, and the heir of the Castlemaynes was come to make good his pledge.

A half-hour later and the lovers stood hand-in-hand in the old mill-house parlor, while the young man made his plea for the one ewe lamb—a fashion but little followed by the young America of 1876.

They made a picture whose artistic grouping would have charmed a critical eye—the young couple all life, light and hope—the miller firm, dark and haughty, leaning against, yet disdaining the support of, the smoke-stained mantel-piece—his wife, like some pale embodiment of despair framed in the vine-wreathed window-seat—and the flickering October sunshine flinging tricky darts of light over all.

"Am I to understand you, sir, that your father forbids you to marry my daughter?" asked the miller, in clear, cutting tones.

"Alas, yes, sir. But he will soon relent. I am his only child, and, after him, the sole surviving representative of an ancient and honorable family," answered Ernest.

"He looks upon your marriage with my daughter as a *mesalliance* for 'the sole surviving representative of an ancient and honorable family?' " again demanded the stern, clear voice.

"He does not know Ouida, sir, and the prejudices of class, long cherished, are not to be blown away with a single breath," said the young man, an intercessory tremor agitating his words.

"That was very wisely said, young gentleman; and now be so good as to bear my greatest respect to the head of your 'ancient and honorable family,' and tell him that Hugh Haughton declines, with all due deference, the honor of an alliance with the house of Castlemayne, for his daughter."

"You are mocking me, sir. You cannot mean to part us upon an excuse so light as a foolish prejudice that will vanish like the dew before the sun when once my father knows your daughter"—and the youth's grasp tightened with involuntary cruelty upon the little hand for which he sued.

"It is not my habit to jest, and I repeat, sir, more emphatically, that I will not give my daughter to you in marriage."

"Have you any personal objections to me?"

"None, young man. But I know the accursed pride and jealousy of your class, and that happiness is not born of a marriage where there is the shadow of condescension on either side."

"There is no condescension here, sir. Nature has endowed Ouida with a nobility above the patent of kings. Could I place the coronet of a duchess upon her brow it would be but a just acknowledgment of the honor unto which she was born."

A white flame played about the miller's thin, set lips; his hand clenched beneath the dusty shadow of his sleeve, but he only said:

"I tell you *it shall not be!*"

As the flint strikes fire from its steely tinder-box, so the Castlemayne tiger flashed from its nervy jungle and gave proud passion to the quick reply:

"And I tell you, sir, that I will not sacrifice her happiness and mine to the false and unjust promptings of reasonless whims. I love your daughter, and if she does not renounce that love the will of all Christendom combined shall not suffice to separate us. Farewell for the present, my Ouida;" and, bowing lowly as a prince before his sire, Ernest quitted the house.

As a mountain-stream glides in gentle submission to the restraining power of its rocky banks until it meets the jagged resistance of some sharp bowlder, spouts upward, and flashes in violent torrents adown its shrinking bed, so the current of young life flows in equable obedience between its parent banks until a bowlder cleaves it to the heart, then it shoots upward, overleaps confinement, and dashes defiance in cold, mad passion over the thing that would obstruct.

For an instant Ouida stood like a marble Eve before the closing gates of Paradise; then, turning like a young pythoness with blazing eyes, she demanded:

"Father, why is it that you thus set your foot upon the brightness of my whole future? There is more in this than appears upon the surface. Is it because you fear to give any one the right to question you concerning my antecedents? Have you murdered any one that you have hidden from the world and would immolate me upon a pyre of your transgressions?"

A change like that which stamped the countenance of the fallen Lucifer smote the features of the man with unspeakable fury as he thundered, with the power of a Stentor:

"Hold! Hold your infernal tongue, girl, or by all the powers of Hades I'll drag it from between your unfilial lips!"

"Do so!" came from the stung soul of the

girl; "do so, ere I curse the fate that gave me such a father."

"By the gods! I'll cure this impertinence!" shouted the miller, and fastening his iron gripe upon the delicate girlish shoulder he dragged her unresisting form to the entrance of her little chamber, and then with savage cruelty flung her from him.

With ringing tread he crossed the little parlor and strode across the open green between the house and mill. Back he came with the same hard face and step, bearing in his hands a hammer and some iron spikes, and with devilish deliberation proceeded to nail the heavy bedroom-door to its oaken frame. This done, he once more turned upon his heel, passed out of the house, unmindful of the despairing face in the shadow of the vine-curtained window, and was lost in the restless chaos of the clattering mill.

"Oh, God, so do our sins transforms us! Is there no power in time or place to

Minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow;
Raze out the written troubles of the brain;
And, with some sweet, oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?"

Oh, my child, better hadst thou never been than to have been born of such as I!" moaned Mrs. Haughton, in tones of intensest anguish, and sunk a quivering heap upon the sanded floor.

CHAPTER V.

LOVE LAUGHS AT LOCKSMITHS.

"All within is dark as night:
In the window is no light;
And no murmur at the door,
So frequent on its hinge before."

"Farewell: and if my fortune be not crost,
I have a father, you a daughter, lost."

THE little chamber that was Ouida's maiden bower, and in which she had been fastened by her infuriated father, was in a sort of lean-to that had been added to the main building, and projected out over the stream emptying from the mill-race. Attached to the sill-timbers there still remained a part of the carpenter's scaffolding, forming a narrow ledge scarce wide enough for foothold. There was but one small window, and that was shuttered by the rocky bank rising some three feet distant in bold derision of the puny, ever-restless current dashing perpetually against its flinty base; wreathing woodbine climbed here and there adown its sides, and flung graceful tendrils over the gray old house, but their purple flower-cups were now closed in dewy slumber, and "the hour when grave-yards yawn" was fast approaching. No winking light cast fitful shadows over the snow-white couch and dainty feminine appointments of this little room, yet the aching heart imprisoned within its walls had not found peace even in the

Treacherous arms
Of Sleep, that, sated, will restore to Grief
A sweet space from his cruel clutch."

Close by the window she kneels, mingling her passionate thoughts with the roar and dash of the falls, while the cool winds of heaven steal through the brilliant vines to kiss the fever from the maddened brain.

"Ouida!"

An electrical thrill passed over the bowed figure, and pushing back the tangled masses of her hair, the girl murmured in quick aspirates:

"Hark! was that a voice piercing softly the sound of wind and water?"

"Ouida!"

"Who calls? my heart bounds to my throat and chokes me."

"Ouida! It is I, Ernest! Lean your head far out the window; I must speak with you, and would not rouse the sleeping tiger."

"Speak on, dear love! my father sleeps; I hear his breath come and go as steadily as the ticking of a clock."

"My darling, can you brave your father's anger to be my wife? Is your love strong enough for this?" asked the young man, with suppressed eagerness, from his rocky coigne of vantage.

"I can brave anything, Ernest—endure anything but being separated from you," was the soulful answer.

"Then, come what will, *mine* you shall be. Are you fastened in your room?"

"Yes; but there is a door of escape open to me whenever I choose to pass through it."

"Come, then."

"Now—to-night?"

"Yes, to-night. To-morrow may bring us fresh disaster. I will not wait for it."

"Have you considered this so well that you are assured against regret?"

"Can the day regret its sunshine?"

"And will your love be so sure that remorse for having ceased for a moment to honor those who gave me being shall not visit me?"

"May Heaven's justice guide the dagger lightning to my heart when it be found in but an instant's wavering allegiance to thee."

"Wait for me, then, at the old butternut tree, and with God lies the issue."

A loosened stone fell from its unsteady rest into the water with echoing splash, a startled night-bird flew screaming from its perch on some swinging bough, and then silence like a specter hand clutched at the breath of the waking world.

Five minutes passed and the little room, with all its familiar comforts and cherished belongings, was photographed upon the girl's mind. The little daily joys that went to make up the sum of her sixteen years of existence pressed upon her with fond association, until the melancholy hoot of an owl brought her wandering thoughts back to him who waited at the midnight tryst. Some short, sweet hours of joy lay within her reach at all events.

"Then let come what may,
No matter if I go mad,
I shall have had my day."

With still white face, but unflinching hand, Ouida took her hat and a long dark cloak from their accustomed hangings and tossed them across the parting chasm onto the firm land beyond; then, noiselessly as a shadow that parts our eyes from light and is gone, stepped over the low window-sill and swung fearlessly through the gloomy rustle of trembling leaves. Some new courage had infused the once timid heart, for though the water hissed hungrily from its sharp stone bed, and the scarlet berries rattled like summer rain from the torn and strained vines, her steady foot never once faltered nor her firm nerves weakened through-out the perilous descent.

A light glimmered from the best room window, and the escaped girl approached with cautious step and peered into the room.

The candles had burned low in their silver sticks and the slender snuff-capped wicks blazed with blue and sickly light. Upon the hearth the smoldering skeletons of departed fire lay blanketed in ashen white, and the night winds stole through the open windows carrying the chill of a death-damp. The little sharp-cornered table, spread with its blazonry of brodered dragon's heads, was pushed squarely back against the wall, the gilded morocco upon the book-shelves gleamed like Egyptian hieroglyphics in the uncertain light, the claw-footed beaufet stood grimly unmindful of the silver pomps and vanities hidden in its capacious stomach, but the grave face of the tall old clock looked down into the open depths of one of the oaken chests and upon such a gorgeous sheen of satin and of silk as must have made its brazen heart beat fast with envy had it been feminine.

Upon the floor beside the uncovered treasure sat Mrs. Haughton. A bundle of yellowed manuscript lay, as if fallen from her nerveless fingers, beside her, and an open jewel-case in her lap exposed to view the portrait of a lovely woman in royal attire, framed in gold and circling diamonds.

The dark purple stains under the eyes, the little depressions in the once rounded cheeks, and the droop of the sorrowful mouth are thrown into pitiful relief as she slumbers, her head resting upon the seat of a chair, across

which trailed the crimson magnificence of a velvet court-train.

A great round tear had fallen upon the pale wan hands clasped so tightly over the weary breast, and millions of tiny rainbows flashed from its translucent heart into the nooks and crannies of the dreary room. But the sleeper's eyes are closed to the signal of hope, and the moisture still gathers where the dark lashes sweep the blue-veined cheek.

Ah, Mrs. Hemans gathered wisdom from the sighs of humanity when she wrote—

"Are they forgotten? It is not so?
Slumber divides not the heart from its woe."

A mighty agony swelled in the bosom of the daughter as she looked and felt the abandon of despair that had fastened upon the soul of the mother who had foretasted the bitterness of death that she might live, and whom now she would abandon to darkest desolation.

For a moment the earth seemed slipping from beneath her feet, and faltering in her purpose, she half-turned again toward the swinging woodbine ladder. Then the low, sweet call of a cuckoo trembled on the midnight air, and crushing back with wildest effort the rising throes of her yearning heart she bent beneath the power that commands the most filial to forsake father and mother, and like a frightened lapwing flew over the drying fragrance of dead clover, through the checkered green and white of dying mandrake beds, under dew-wet arches of wreathing eglantine, on to where a star-eyed fate stood under the old butternut tree, murmuring:

"She is coming, my dove, my dear;
She is coming, my life, my fate;
The red rose cries, 'She is near, she is near,'
And the white rose weeps, 'She is late,'
The larkspur listens, 'I hear, I hear,'
And the Lily whispers, 'I wait.'"

"She is coming, my own, my sweet;
Were it ever so airy a tread,
My heart would hear her and beat,
Were it earth, in an earthy bed;
My dust would hear her and beat,
Had I lain for a century dead;
Would start and tremble under her feet,
And blossom in purple and red."

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH "THIS WORLD'S POLLY'S" GOOSE APPEARS.

"Gone! flitted away!
Taken the stars from the night and the sun from the day!
Gone, and a cloud in my heart, and a storm in the air!
Flown to the east or the west, flitted I know not where!"

"And now art thou cursed—"

THE morning sun shone brightly over the mill-stream, and threw dancing, slanting shafts of light in at door and window where Mrs. Haughton moved here and there arranging upon a little tray a dainty, tempting breakfast. A plump-breasted wild-bird, done to a nicety, reared its pedal bones from the white, warm breast of a tiny platter, the smell of buckwheat cakes escaped appetizingly from beneath the silver cover of their heated prison; a cut-glass jar of quivering jelly cast a crimson shadow upon the snowy linen cover of the tray; as companion-piece, a slim-throated pitcher gleamed with the amber deliciousness of maple syrup, and a golden pat of butter, stamped with a waving fern-leaf, formed the repast that would have tickled the palate of an Epicurus.

The mother surveyed her work with a sigh of satisfaction, and cast anxious glances from the clattering mill back to the barricaded chamber door, and then to a little pot of fragrant coffee heaving impatient puffs of steam upon the hearth.

There were no traces of last night's disorder about the quaint old room; all was as clean, and tidy, and bright as hands could make it; but the deepened circles about the heavy eyes of its occupant, and the long-drawn breath from the depressed breast, testified that, for her, yesternight's sun had set in tears and risen not with the morn.

A little, thin, treble voice became audible

through the din and roar of the mill, singing that sad little song of old King Alfred's:

"Lo, I sung cheerily
In my bright days,
But now all wearily,
Chant I my lays,
Sorrowing tearfully,
Saddest of men,
Can I sing cheerfully
As I could then?"

"This world's Polly," murmured Mrs. Haughton, flushing slightly as the voice came nearer and she caught the words of the song.

"Worldliness brought me here,
Foolishly blind,
Riches have wrought me here
Sadness of mind;
When I rely on them
Lo, they depart,
Bitterly! bitterly
Rend they my heart."

The small, shriveled figure and sharp features of our "this world" friend, Polly, appeared in the doorway as the last note of the *chan-sonette* died away. She was attired in the costume always worn by her on state occasions, and her silver-white hair streaming down to her waist, from the scarlet confines of a turbaned kerchief, added greatly to the weirdness of her appearance. About her waist a red woolen scarf was gathered over her dark stuff gown, the tangled fringe of which hung nearly to her naked feet, and a chain of bones and beads, bits of leather, fragments of red flannel and pipe-stems ornamented her thin neck.

"Did anybody ever steal anything from you in *this world*?" she asked, with a bobbing courtesy.

Mrs. Haughton smiled a gentle equivoke.

"Well, I never had nothin' stole from me before in *this world*, no, never! and this mornin', in the 'wee, sma' hours ayant the any-time,' some scalawag stole my goose, that the parson give me, and that I wasn't never to cook in *this world*, no, never, but keep it till the dying day of my death to remember the parson by; but, somebody broke into my treasure-house, where moth and rust doth not corrupt, and stole my goose from the hengag; and the parson won't never give me another goose in *this world*, no never! because he has gone where the woodbine twineth and the whang-doodle mourneth for her young."

"Won't you rest a bit and get your breath, Polly?" asked her hostess, placing a chair.

"I ain't got any breath—never did have any in *this world* no, never! I used to breathe through the spout of a tin teapot; but I've given up breathing now; it ain't any use in *this world*, though I've got twenty-five teapots at home all as good as new, except that they hain't got no handles and the noses is battered some. La, there goes the Devil, painted white!" suddenly concluded the singular creature, as she caught a glimpse of the miller passing along on the open green before the mill-door.

"Won't you have a cup of tea, Polly?" interposed Mrs. Haughton, shivering in nervous dread that the miller might hear her visitor's remarks, and, his rage once aroused, her hopes for the silent prisoner would be balked for the day.

"La, since you be so good, I believe I will. I hain't had a cup of tea in *this world*, no, never, since I was bridesmaid to Ruth when she married Boaz, and I never expect to have another till the dying day of my death, no, never! There goes the Devil again! It was a white devil that stole my goose that I wasn't never going to cook in *this world*, no, never. It was a big goose, and a tough goose, and an old goose, and I'll never see it again in *this world*, no, never!"

Polly sighed lugubriously, drank her tea in infinitesimal sips, then arose gingerly to depart. Sliding across the floor toward Mrs. Haughton with mincing side steps she thrust a little, three-cornered note into the lady's hand and said:

"I must be going or some rascal will break in my house, and steal the finest collection of teapots in *this world*. There is a feather I'll leave with you, and if you meet a goose that matches that feather you'll know that it ain't

the goose the parson give me, and that I wasn't never a-going to cook in *this world, no, never!*"

The door clanged shut with a hollow jar that made the dishes on the waiting-tray dance a little jig, and Mrs. Haughton stood as if rooted to the floor with the slip of paper trembling in her nervous clutch. Her quick eye scanned the written page, and a groan, such as was wrung from the surcharged breast of Lady Macbeth in the curdling anguish of her sleep-walking hours, smote the echoing silence.

Again and yet again she read the missive, slowly, as if forcing her dazed mind to an understanding of its import.

A ringing boot-heel crunched on the gravel outside the door, and stern and dark, yet with the flush of exercise dyeing his cheek, the miller entered the room. As if his presence had pierced her understanding the pallid-lipped woman sprung into conscious anguish and with a heart-rending moan, exclaimed:

"Oh, Hugh, our child has gone! You have driven all of life from me save breath; now fasten your iron gripe about my throat, and crown your cruelties with mercy."

For an instant the miller staggered as one who perishes for air, and the warm color faded from cheek and brow; then, with the power of a Hercules, nerving his muscular arm, he wrenched the oaken door from its fastening, and a current of cool air from the open window struck as a chill from an open vault.

There was the little white-curtained bed with tidy, unruffled coverlid and pouting pillows undented by the bright young head; there were her sewing-basket—her rustic pencil pictures—her books—a half-withered bunch of latest autumn flowers, and the numberless dainty details with which womanhood, even when bound down by the

"Short and simple annals of the poor," delights to surround itself, but the cage was empty—the bird had flown.

"Gone! gone!" the miller echoed, in tones like the hollow roar of ocean in the heart of some rocky cave, while the hardness dropped like a mask from his forehead, upon which the beaded dew started, sick and cold:

"Gone! The curse of Cain is upon me!"

CHAPTER VII.

MORNING.

"The words of his mouth were softer than butter, having war in his heart; his words were smoother than oil, and yet be they very swords."

It is not my purpose to follow the eloping lovers through the little delicious nothings that made the first, sweet blush of matrimony a foretaste of heaven.

Honeymoons are rarely of interest to any but principals, and I esteem neglect the kindest treatment one can give newly-married youth.

They will not be disposed to feel seriously any breach of etiquette Madame De Trop makes in not calling during the brief, first weeks of mutual absorption. The wisest and strongest are weakest and silliest while the glamour of love's consummation lasts, and he who would his hero still worship must draw a veil, in delicate friendliness, around the folly-decked dawn of that hero's first weeks of married life.

Ouida had been the happy wife of Ernest Castlemayne six winged months when they were summoned to the death-bed of Ernest's father, and now the miller's daughter reigned over the gloomy splendor of the old stone mansion, and fared sumptuously every day.

Ernest had refitted and modernized certain portions of the interior, and the morning upon which we catch up the thread of their lives finds Ouida the occupant of an exquisite little boudoir looking like a big blue convolvulus from the bay-window, where sat a man toying with the feathery sprays of a wreathing, swaying air-plant, and watching the red rose come and go in the cheek of the fair mistress of the bower as she talked.

This man was Emile St. Pierre, who had come, a child, to live under the Castlemayne roof—God knows from where, or through

what claim upon its master, but the world did not share in the knowledge. He had grown to manhood under the same influences—favored with the same advantages, sharing qually with the heir in all things, and at the old gentleman's death had received by will a handsome property from the Castlemayne estate.

He was a man about the medium hight, with square, firm-knit shoulders and well-developed muscles. His head was evenly balanced, and his eye, flashing the black fire of a charm-weaving serpent's, illuminated a pale, opaque face set in curling masses of midnight hair.

Only one defect appeared in the physical perfectness of the man, and that was that hideous birth-mark—a cloven foot! Socially he was a person of singular fascination, and by some subtle tact he managed to bend the will of those with whom he was associated to his wishes. So cunningly was this done that few ever suspected the favorite's agency, though they might experience a vague uneasiness in feeling their personality somehow undermined.

Emile St. Pierre was the only person of whose influence over her husband Ouida was in the slightest degree impatient. With a woman's wonderful intuition she saw through those scintillating eyes down into the venom-freighted soul of the man, and with the protective quality of love strained to eternal vigilance she watched and made their home agreeable to her husband's friend that she might anticipate and thwart any stealthy designs upon their domestic happiness.

She had rightly estimated the man, yet in the innocence of her leal heart she attributed the evil she felt to be in him to a feeling of resentment toward her for having won the warmest love of his friend and so in a manner exiled him from Ernest's heart and hearth. She resolved to say nothing of her secret fears, but with infinite discretion to set about disarming the rankling demon and so ward off the ills of which a presentiment always came to her at sight of St. Pierre.

Emile and Ernest had never known a break in their brotherly intimacy until they left college and Emile sailed for a three months' tour through France, while Ernest was ordered to rusticate awhile among the health-breathing Glenville Hills.

Upon Mr. Castlemayne's decease and Ernest's domicillage with his fair young bride in the family mansion, Emile had moved his possessions to a house in the city that had become his through a provision in the dead man's will, and there he set up a bachelor establishment.

Ernest protested against his leaving their boyhood's home, but Emile insisted upon going, giving as a reason that he wished to pursue his favorite studies, chemistry and science, without fear of being molested or annoying any one with his experiments. "If I blow my own roof off, it will be a small matter, but to uncap the ancient stronghold of the Castle-maynes would be quite a different affair," he said, and as usual carried his point.

Still, he was almost a daily visitor at the gray-stone house, and Madame Rumor assured his friends that he had not found the young Mrs. Castlemayne so great a bugbear as he had imagined her.

"So you do not echo Lord Byron's epigrammatic remark: 'I have been two years married; whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth?'" St. Pierre was saying as we enter the sky-tinted boudoir on aerial wings.

"Most certainly not," was the lady's answer, a lovely light shining in the violet eyes. "I could rather, with Faust,

—To the passing moments say,
Stay! thou art so fair!"

"Then you have mastered the art of life?"

"Yes—if that be to enjoy."

"Ah! but to enjoy we must live in the instant we grasp. When once we look back or forward, then the trail of the serpent has marred our Eden!"

"I have no wish to look either way. The present crowns my existence with a golden sum of sweet content. The past is irrevocable; the future past finding out!"

"And you will not borrow the sackcloth and serge before it is forced upon you! Well, it is wise to regard life as a *fete des roses*, but the roses usually wither before the *festa* is over, and there is no magic to make them bloom again, for there is none that renews us—youth. The Helots had their one short joyous festival in their long year of labor; life may leave us ours."

"Yes, and I shall not make anticipation a harder master than was the Pharaohan king by making bricks of trouble without straws with which to prematurely bow my back and so make welcome the hour when I shall turn my face to the wall and die."

"Your theoretic acceptance of life is certainly not without wisdom, and your rose-wreaths are as alluring as those of Aglae and Astarte; but for one or two exceptions I might say 'Almost thou persuadest me.'"

"To marry? I wish you would!"

"Heaven forefend! I am already wedded to Science."

"So one might believe if they were to credit all the wonderful stories concerning that mysterious room at the top of your house, across the threshold of which no vandal of our world is allowed to pass."

"Ah, madame, that mystical room contains nothing but the proper appointments of a laboratory. It is only the fact that it is the only room in my house not open to the public that makes it remarkable. Some day I hope to have the honor of revealing its barrenness to your curious eyes."

"Oh, fie, St. Pierre! You speak as if curiosity was my besetting sin. Suppose I test your manly superiority a little: would you not like to attend me at my last sitting for the portrait I am having painted as a birthday surprise for Ernest? You are such a connoisseur that I should like your opinion upon it."

"Indeed I should be delighted; when do you visit the studio?"

"At two o'clock this afternoon."

"Very well; I have an engagement at twelve, so I will bid you good-morning now, and come around again in time to attend you."

"Good-morning! Please be careful in speaking before Ernest, as I want the surprise to be complete."

"*Certainement, madame!*" and with a slight inclination of his head and a blue flame darting from his active eye, St. Pierre quitted the azure hung apartment, caressing nervously the artistically waxed tips of his silky black mustache.

CHAPTER VIII.

NIGHT.

"But it was even thou, my companion, my guide, and mine own familiar friend."
"Let death come hastily upon them, and let them go down quick into hell."

THE drawing-room of Castlemayne House was all ablaze with light, and the glowing warmth of sea-coal burning in the open grates were better nurses of content than incitives to injustice and contention; but, the soul of the master was convulsed with the fiercest of all passions as he paced up and down the stately apartment in restless waiting.

A little spark had some weeks ago fallen upon the bit of tow that bound the Castlemayne lion, and within the hour a slight breeze had fanned the smoldering fire into a blaze, and the ferocious beast had broken loose and was shaking his tawny mane in terrible menace above the smiling infant, peace.

Six months of such happiness as rarely falls to the lot of man had been Ernest's, but now in the twinkling of an eye the inherent jealousy of his race had sprung into life and wiped its unkind hand over all the spotless record of devotion and confidence.

Alas, poor Ouida! The curse of the sins of the fathers visited upon the children had fallen, and she was to be crucified between the pitiless jealousy of her husband and the foul, treacherous love of her husband's friend!

Yes, Ernest was jealous—jealous of the man between him and whom a love akin to that of Damon and Pythias had so long existed;—the

man with whom, as boy and boy, he had shared his sports and penances, whose battles he had fought in their hot, impetuous youth, and whose ambition he had fostered in their early manhood.

He had held himself above the ungenerous promptings of the foul-eyed passion with manly scorn, until, entering his wife's dressing-room an hour before, he had found her absent and a tell-tale note upon the toilet-table, and now, like Saul of Tarsus, "he breathed out threatenings and slaughter" against the wife whom his jealousy had condemned upon the evidence of a bit of paper, and the man who had been unto him as a brother, but whom he now thought of as the betrayer of his honor.

For the fortieth time he reads the, to him, damning evidence:

"DEAR MADAME OUIDA:

"I am unavoidably detained and so cannot keep my engagement at two o'clock, but I shall give myself the pleasure of meeting you at the place of appointment sometime during the afternoon. I don't think Ernest suspects.

"Yours,

ST. PIERRE."

This was the "trifle light as air" to our enlightened understanding, that was to the "jealous mind" of the husband "confirmation strong as proofs of holy writ."

"Oh, that mine eyes had never beheld her fair false face, or had the light of heaven faded forever from them ere they gazed upon such cruel evidence of her dishonor! I have loved her well, and she did leave the tender safety of her mother's arms for mine embrace. And yet a little while she loved me too; but is it not true that woman's love is a mocking, cursed jack-o-lantern that mires deepest those who most do trust its allurings? I gave her the warmest, truest, and most perfect love man ever gave to woman, and she, with face as smooth and smiling as if no guile had ever stirred her blood to shame, kept my faith to make it the byword of my friend! Curse him! I found not his kisses on her lips, though oft they may have fallen there. Curse him! He fattened upon my substance; made my neck a stepping-stone to most ambitious fortune, and then with cursed wiles he wins my white dove from me to defile and then destroy. Curses on him! Had he a million lives they were but a drop in the cup of my revenge!" So groaned the strong man as he bowed in reasonless anguish before the onslaught of the green-eyed monster.

The trailing of silken robes and the patting of tiny boot-heels adown the oaken staircase indicated a woman's coming, and, with a happy flush in her rose-leaf cheek, Ouida stood smiling and tender-eyed before her husband.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, dear," she said, as she crossed the room and rested her hand gently upon his arm.

"Your latest fancy is doubtless more exacting in his humors than I have been. Make no apologies madam; your ingenuity is equal to your dissembling, but, unfortunately, it is only wasted in further exercise," answered the Castlemayne lion, spurning the tender hand.

"My latest fancy! Ingenuity! Dissembling! Are you mad, Ernest, or do you but rebuke my tardiness with mock anger? These are strange words with which to fright your wife."

"You play the innocent to the life, madam, but it will avail you nothing. I mean that your relations with Emile St. Pierre are known to me."

"My relations with Emile St. Pierre?"

"Even so, madam. To-day, as I went to pay my usual visit to your chamber, I found the evidence in his own handwriting upon your toilet-table, and with these eyes I saw him leave your carriage returning from the meeting. I beg you will make no scene; I do not choose to be made the butt of servants' vulgar jokes, and tears will not soften a heart turned to adamant by your perfidy."

"Tears! Do you think that I shall shed a tear in deference to such a charge? You know me not, sir. You strike deeper than you have power to heal, and mortal wounds are slow to bleed."

"A wanton's tears spring from dry wells

and may well be slow in the shedding. I could curse you, but that I feel 'tis retributive justice. I stooped too far to pick up nothing, and my stooping has fulfilled its prediction, for from it comes the first blot upon an honorable name."

"Nothing! Wanton! Say on, Sir Oracle; these are brave words for delicate ears, and yet I shrink not from them."

"I could crush you where you stand, thou fatal fairness, but that I must take two lives for the one you forfeit; and yet, in taking that, I might but kill an adder's spawn."

"Soft, most generous lord! I face you with a spirit fearless as your own and tremble not before the demon of your wrath. The life you thirst for is not worth the spilling, therefore tarnish not the immaculate home of your forefathers with it."

"Hold, do not drive me into forgetting that you are a woman—at least in semblance, though your tongue distills venom through the laboratory of your falsity. I would not that the world should commiserate my wrongs, and so I will not turn you from the home you have contaminated. I will take care that you do not further shame the name you bear, and, for the rest, I would never more see your face, nor hear your voice, except as the hollow form we call society demands the blinding of its Argus eyes."

"Oh, love, oh, friendship—what cockatrices' eggs ye are!"

"You shall have your wish, sir. You have insulted, outraged and wronged me, and I repudiate the vow that made me the chattel of such a monster. Were fifty hells the consequence I would accept them all rather than return to your thralldom. No child of mine shall eat your bread, and if in the fullness of time I may find the vein wherein flows kindred blood to such as thou, mine own hand shall let it out even to the shedding of the last drop that animates the heart now beating beneath mine own. I throw thy foulness in thy teeth—thou traducer of defenseless womanhood—thou coward!"

A devil of passion leaped into the man's eye at these stinging words, and like lightning he sprung toward her and by a single blow struck her to the floor.

Stunned and motionless she lay across the velvet lion upon the Persian carpet like some fair Una slain by her fierce, false playfellow. For a moment Ernest thought her dead, so white and deathlike was her face, and sick and faint, with anger held in sudden paralysis, he gazed as if fascinated by the spectacle that branded him the most despicable of all beings—a woman-striker.

Slowly, as if rising from the weight of some hideous nightmare, Ouida regained her feet. Feebly she raised her hand and put back from her face the pitying ripples of her golden hair. She shuddered as she caught the reflection of one bright spot of blood upon her temple, and with a strange, slow smile, said:

"It is only one little drop, my lord—yet if thy life should exceed the limit allotted to mortal man thrice-told, thou couldst not find a Lethean stream with power to wash it out!"

Then he heard a sound as if the

"Sable garments of the night
Trailed through her marble halls,"

and he was alone with his pride, his jealousy and his remorse.

CHAPTER IX.

HOUSELESS BY NIGHT.

"The wind and the wet, the wind and the wet!
Wet west wind, how you blow, you blow!"

"Let me resign a wretched breath,
Since now remains to me
No other balm than kindly death
To soothe my misery!"

THE March wind swept swiftly through the broad avenues, and howled dismally down the dark alleys, and the pitiless rain and sleet beat cruelly down upon the upturned face of a woman lying prostrate upon the wet, cold pavement, just where the jutting corner of a rickety

old tenement-house cast an angular shadow into the murky night.

It was a night in which every living thing sought shelter. The mangy cur that was wont to make the darkness hideous with its howls lay silent and miserable under the dripping cover of a broken step. The ragged little gamins that people the midnight air with horrid and ghostly sounds crowded their shivering frames into the reeking kennel of some overturned ash-barrel or lay curled in the comparative comfort of some emptied dry-goods box. The beetling arches of every silent church door had its quota of chilled limbs and chattering teeth crouching beneath away from the pelting storm. Even those wretched creatures whom, in hideous mockery, the world calls *nymphes du pave*, shrunk from the bitter wind and rain, and hid their hollow painted cheeks where noisome bat-wings brushed them close, and flame-eyed rats turned from their shrunken limbs to better food.

Only some careworn toiler over accounts that would not balance—some fast young debauchee reeling away from the green-baize table, or some whose daily toil reached far into the hours God made for rest, aroused, with echoing footsteps, the guardians of the night from peaceful noddings in some sheltering doorway; yet a woman, young and fair to look upon, lay beneath the starless sky, and wind and storm, cold and pain, fought in vain to wound her, for she was as one dead.

Up the street—past the row of lamps looking like sickly fireflies in the thick darkness, came a tall, lank-limbed figure, who, but for his stooping shoulders, would have seemed some skeleton shadow stalking with the storm. Little could be seen of his face, so completely was he muffled in the shabby-genteel folds of a long Spanish cloak, such as some cavalier in the time of Ferdinand and Isabella might have worn when seeking stolen sweets under soft Castilian skies. On he came, with one hand holding his black drapery between his face and the driving sleet, seeing not, but walking with the confidence of one who knows every foot of the ground whereon he treads, until, passing the prostrate figure, his long feet tangled in her wind-tossed garments and his bones rattled in violent elongation upon the wet and slippery stones.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated, gathering himself up; "bless my soul! I hope I'm all here. Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall." That was an exceedingly nasty place for a careful man to lay down his clothes. God bless my soul, what is this?" and the wiry figure started back in horror and amazement as the capitious wind bared a white jeweled hand to his startled gaze.

"A woman with a face like one of Raphael's angels, and a hand and arm like the Venus de Milo, lying in the mud of the streets on such a night as this! Ah, it was not thus that beauty slept in the days when chivalry made all men knights! Bless my soul!—and she wears the badge of wifehood, too, guarded by a diamond keeper! Ah, well! 'There is but one God, and Mahomet is his prophet'; she is not yet dead. I'll carry her in. It's an ill wind that blows nobody good. Lucky it happened so near my local habitation. Easy—easy, Pastengon."

"Take her up tenderly—
Fashioned so slenderly!"

God bless my soul! I wonder how it happened?"

Pushing open with his elbow the unlatched door of the swarming old tenement hive, he toiled with his unconscious burden through creaking, tortuous halls, until he came to a door around which there shone an even seam of light, and halted, calling:

"What ho, there! Meme!"

"Coming, father!" answered a fresh young voice, and hasty fingers undid the clumsy fastenings; the door swung on its creaking hinges, and she who had been "houseless by night" found that God had been able to raise her up friends even from the very stones of the street.

CHAPTER X.

THE SINS OF THE FATHER.

"Oh, grief beyond all other griefs, when fate
First leaves the young heart lone and desolate
In the world, without that only tie
For which it loved to live or fear'd to die."

THREE weeks of alternating sunshine and shadow had passed since the night when Ouida Castlemayne had been found by Carl Pastengon and carried, a senseless, almost lifeless burden, into the warmth and comfort of the little room he called his home.

During those three weeks the storm-driven woman had lain upon the very borders of the shadow-land, with the cold tide of the river Styx rolling up to her trespassing feet.

In the wildness of her delirium she had told enough of her pitiful story to touch a sympathetic cord in the hearts of those who so kindly ministered to her, and now at last youth and a good constitution had wrested a victory from the covetous gripe of disease and death, and the patient was convalescing, though wan and weak as a new-born infant.

She lay among the pillows of a motherly, chintz-covered lounge, looking for the first time with seeing eyes around upon the material appointments of the refuge unto which she had been led.

Pastengon's family consisted only of himself and a young daughter who, at the moment Ouida's inquiring gaze fell upon her, was engaged in holding a piece of bread impaled upon a toasting-fork over the scorching coals.

Meme Pastengon was a pretty girl, and the apple of her father's eye. Her cheeks were a little pale now from protracted watching, but her eyes were bright and brown as a mountain thrush, and a cheerful look always upon her face made it good for chronic discontent to look upon her. In complexion she was a clear brunette, and her black-brown hair clustered in infinitesimal rings all over her round little head.

Pretty Meme was as unlike her father as it is possible for one person to be unlike another. He now sat in long-drawn-out ungainliness, in a homely arm-chair, dividing his attention between the invalid's couch, the culinary operations of his little housekeeper, and a snuff-box carved in the shape of a huge dragon-fly. His clothes were cut after the fashion of a half-century ago, and were worn to a condition of painful glossiness. His forehead was high and narrow, and his scant gray hair crept away from a crown as bald and shining as the monks of old rejoiced in. His nose once had been imposing when flanked by full cheeks, but it now stood out between the cavernous hollows of his dim and watery eyes, over the thin, shrunken lips, like a sharp rock over a chasm—a monument that told the departed glory of a once handsome face. He wore an enormous black stock, above which a white rim of scrupulous neatness showed, and his vest was, like good old Grimes's coat, "double-breasted" and "buttoned down before."

Carl Pastengon was by birth and education an actor, but his day of great parts was past and gone, and not being content to bend his genius to minor ones, he had left the stage and devoted his time to the teaching of elocution and the diligent snuffing of snuff. Meme had taken up the thread of her father's ambition, and was soubrette in one of the city theaters; and here they lived, happy in themselves and each other, envying none in the wide world in the satisfaction of their mutual content.

"What place is this, and how came I here?" asked Ouida, as her quick eye noted her strange surroundings.

"God bless my soul!" jerked out Pastengon, in his quick, nasal tones, while Meme dropped her toasting-fork and crossed the room to the side of the couch.

"Among friends, madame, but please do not talk much; you have been very sick," answered the young nurse.

"It must be so, for I feel my strength all ooze out at my finger-tips with the mere consciousness of breathing. How long have I been here?"

"Three weeks, lady. Father found you in a dead faint at our very door. He brought you in, and ever since you have been battling with a terrible fever."

"Has Er—has no one been here inquiring for me?"

"No one, madame. You were too sick to tell us your wishes, and father thought it best to await your convalescence before making any move to find your friends."

"Such thoughtfulness is what I scarce hoped to find but am most grateful for. By-and-by we will converse at length; but now a strange drowsiness presses on my eyelids and thickens my speech."

"Then drink this strengthening draught and sleep. It will do you more good than a whole apothecary shop or an army of doctors," said Meme, who watched with grave, bird-like eye until her patient's breathing indicated the efficacious touch of nature's sweet restorer.

Then with deft and noiseless motion she covered the little round table with a spotless cloth, and set about preparing their simple breakfast.

Soon all was ready, and the father and daughter began their pleasant meal.

"What is to be, will be, and that proves it," said Pastengon, sipping his coffee with slow enjoyment, and jabbing his thin nose in the direction of the chintz nosegays on the lounge.

"How so, father?" asked Meme, between savage little bites of her sharp white teeth at a chicken's wing. "It has seemed to me all along as if you knew more about this lady than the simple circumstance connected with her being here."

"So I do, child, and not much about her either, except to know that she is the child of parents whom I knew in our palmy days. Bless my soul! how time *does* fly!"

"Did you come to identify her through her ravings, father?"

"Yes, daughter."

"Is there any reason why you should not tell me all about it? I am dying to know, for I'm sure it's almost like a play."

"Curiosity is a womanly weakness, my dear."

"And its gratification a manly one. Father, won't you tell me the story? I am sure there is romance in it."

"Ay, and tragedy, too. Many a novel has grown from smaller germs of both. The poor child little knows what a claim she has upon my sympathy. Ah, 'God is great and Mahomet is his prophet!'"

"Yes, father; but please go on with the story," urged Meme, clasping her small hands in impatient entreaty.

The old man continued in reflective tones: "It seems as if it were only yesterday week that I saw her mother, in her royal robes of crimson velvet, looking a very queen as she came before the curtain at old Drury Lane to receive the homage of applause after her matchless reproduction of Queen Catherine."

"Was her mother an actress, father?"

"Yes," answered Pastengon, a heavy, wakeful sigh from the region of the lounge pillows passing unnoticed in the absorption of their mutual interest.

"Yes; her mother was an actress, and made one of the most promising *debutts* the English stage has ever witnessed. The house was packed from gallery to pit, and she took them by storm."

"Everybody predicted a failure, and voted the manager mad in permitting her to make her first appearance in a part requiring such peculiar talent as Queen Catherine; but the manager's head was level, for, from the first line until the fall of the curtain, she was the noble, injured queen, full of deep and awful feeling, going beyond the province of passion, yet displaying the most intense passion of which the human heart is capable. Bless my soul, how she held the house in almost breathless attention, and when she exclaimed:

"Ye tell me what ye wish for both—my ruin.
Is *this* your Christian counsel? Out upon ye!

Heaven is above all yet; there sits a Judge
That no king can corrupt."

and lifting her hand, swept back her straying tresses with a gesture of settled but resigned despair, you might have heard a pin drop in the theater except for the labored breathing of the audience."

"If her genius was so great, how came she to be living in an obscure mill-house here in America, as this poor lady's ravings would intimate?"

"Ah, child, by reason of a blight called love that falls too often upon beauty and talent!"

"Why, father, I am sure love is very nice unless people take it too hard."

"Very true, daughter: but there's the rub. There are some constitutions that everything goes hard with. In England, whether it be because the customs of society so hedge the young people in that no woman dare be natural enough to be lovable, or because the women of our profession, being the only actually free women on God's earth, monopolize a good share of the feminine wit and attractiveness, nearly every actress numbers one or more of the titled gentry in her train of admirers. Lola Monteith, this lady's mother, was unfortunate enough to win the admiration of the eldest and second son of the old Duke of Lorne. Hugh, the eldest, was a fine fellow, full of dash and spirit, a very devil in his tempers, but honorable and generous to a fault among his fellows; but Sintram, the second son, was the direct opposite of Hugh, being low and licentious in his habits, and wearing the white feather, too, if report did not belie him.

"Both of these young men were very devoted to Lola, but we people of the company thought she most favored Hugh, although she was wonderfully discreet in showing her preference. One morning, some two weeks before the close of the season, all London was convulsed with the report of the death of the old duke and his second son, Sintram. Dame Rumor said that Sintram had come to his death at the hands of an unknown assassin, and that the shock of the terrible deed had killed his father. It was a nine days' wonder, aggravated by the departure of the young duke for parts unknown and the retirement of the popular Lola from the stage, but it was soon forgotten, and buried under succeeding events, and very few ever got at the truth of the story."

"Well, what was the truth of it, father?"

"The truth, child! Ah, bless my soul, but the truth was a very sad matter! It seemed that Lola and Lord Hugh had been privately married, but Lola insisted on playing out her engagement before the marriage was made public. This was very unfortunate, as it turned out, for Sintram, not knowing her to be his brother's wife, and bent upon the gratification of his own dishonorable passion for her, was shot through the heart by Hugh in an attempt to abduct Lola on her way home from the theater."

"Oh, father, what did they do with him?"

"Nothing, child. The law is very courteous to the nobility in England as in other countries. The old duke was dead; the duchess lost her reason and had to be put under medical restraint to protect her against herself, and Hugh, then Duke of Lorne, found it not difficult to keep the matter from the light of day, particularly as he took his young wife, and left England immediately—indeed, left the world so far as the pomp and circumstance of his hereditary position were concerned, for his younger brother bears the title, and but few know that it is not rightfully his."

"Oh, father! Do you really mean to tell me that this lady's mother was once a famous English actress, and that her father is a real live duke, although living now as an humble miller among the hills of Central New York?"

"Surely, my child. The unwritten stories of life often exceed in strangeness the most extravagant creation of the novelist's brain."

'What is to be will be,' and, if I mistake not, the child now feels the weight of the rod that smites from generation to generation."

"Good friend!" said a voice, quivering, thin and clear; from the pillows of the gay old lounge.

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Pastengon, forgetting in his excited surprise to administer the pinch of snuff he had shoved back from the table to take, and now held between his thumb and finger, suspended midway between the beheaded dragon-fly and his olfactory organ.

"Good friend, I heard your little story, and thank God who led my wandering feet this way. My mother's heart beats through mine, and shows me a path to independence."

Exhausted with emotion, the invalid sunk back into Meme's sympathetic arms.

"Bless my soul, why not? What is to be will be," said the old teacher of elocution, wiping a furtive tear from his cavernous cheek; and thus it was that out of the darkness there came light to the soul of Ouida, and from the fullness of her heart she murmured:

"Whereas I was blind, now I see."

CHAPTER XI.

A BROTHER'S BLOOD.

"Turn, hellhound, turn!"

It was just at sunrise of a cloudless April morning that two men reached, from opposite directions, a little grassy plateau hedged in by nodding oaks and cedars.

The air was vocal with the jubilate of returning summer birds, and fragrant with the breath of early apple-blossoms. Violets peep in half-opened timidity from the bosom of springing grasses; wild crocuses lift their purple heads in courageous defiance of late frosts, and yellow dandelions stare with a million sunbright eyes from the warm south slope of every bank.

Silently, and all unmindful of the beautiful miracle of nature's spring-time resurrection, these men faced each other.

Below them the peaceful river rolled like a shimmering silver thread through the wooded vales and across the smiling meadows that marked the glowing landscape, and beyond the climbing hills raised their verdant crowned heads in ambitious towerings to meet the lowering sky; but, the deadly purpose gleaming in those opposed eyes blinded the perceptions of the souls speaking through them to every benign influence of earth and sky.

A strange and terrible calmness sat upon the gallant beauty of Ernest Castlemayne as he stood thus in the presence of the man to whom he owed the deepest anguish life holds within its galled cup. Upon his brow there rested a tranquillity more horrible than the fiercest outbreaks of rage, or the most hopeless abandonment of woe.

He stood as, in the days of Philip the Fair, one of his race had stood to be bound to the Templar's pyre; his hand was clenched and a quick shudder ran through all his limbs, shaking him as with the shudder of an icy cold; but his eyes flashed like tempered steel, and he fronted his Nemesis with a look under which that dark soul writhed through its conscious lesson—"I am nobler than thou!"

It was no longer Alcibiades amidst the gay levity, the dreamy languor, and rose-garlanded revels of his Olympian youth-joys with whom St. Pierre was called to cope, but Alcibiades grander in his dethronement than in his triumphs, who looked at him with eyes that menaced danger, and all unquailed by mighty woe, as the roused Sybarite might have looked upon his murderers.

But Emile St. Pierre was none the less a murderer because his joy-crowned Greek had looked upon the ashes of his rose-wreaths and become a warrior. He looked with unflinching gaze toward the rising day-god in bloodless calculation of its effect upon the accuracy of aim. His toilet was as careful as if to attend

a morning concert instead of being bent upon an errand of blood. His manner was as replete with debonair grace as if he were about to lead some fairest of Eve's daughters through the intoxicating mazes of the dance, instead of standing up before the leaden vengeance of an outraged friendship; and his *beaute du diable* as fresh as if remorse were powerless to touch the fountains of his life.

"Hell-born! where did you hide that my vengeance must needs wait upon those creeping weeks past?" demanded Ernest, his white teeth glaring with a wolfish hungriness for life.

"You wrong me, *mon ami*; absence is not always hiding," answered St. Pierre, a devilish sneer curling his blood-red lips.

A tigerish impulse impelled the injured man to tear out the taunting tongue that mocked his misery, but he restrained the passion that tempted him, and with unnatural severity undid the fastenings of a mahogany box he carried and throwing it open upon the grass pointed to the silver-mounted pistols there disclosed with a gesture that indicated the limit of endurance was almost reached and not to be mistaken.

"I understand!" said St. Pierre, with an imitable shrug of his shoulders; "but I beg you will wait one moment; I have a word to say before indulging in that little pastime. Do you know *why* I hate you, Ernest Castlemayne?"

"No, unless it is because such natures as yours hate naturally those who serve them, and because you have robbed me of love and honor," answered Ernest, in bitterest loathing.

"Bah, that but helped to fill the measure of my hate. I hate you for the very reason that Cain hated Abel, because you had the favor of both heaven and earth, while I am outcast. Girard Castlemayne was as much my father as yours; but I was an unknown mongrel, banned before my birth to wear my mother's name, while you were the legitimate scion of the 'ancient and honorable' stock. But even mongrels love their dams, and I sucked hate from mine, as the Caligula sucked blood. Above my mother's deserted and shame-killed corse I swore to drag the Castlemayne honor in the dust, and wring from the proud bearers of the name the last vestige of their crimson joy-blossoms, and I have kept my oath. Your wife, upon whom I cast the blight of suspicion, and whom you drove in bitter wrath from the shelter of your roof, was as pure and spotless as yonder white-winged dove. You thought she fled with me, but I swear to you that I have never seen her since the day you witnessed our parting. 'Tis more than likely the river gave her kindly welcome when all else had failed her; yet, should she still live, and the devil, whose hoof I wear, deserts me not, I'll find her and drag her to your grave—a ruined woman!"

"Oh, dear Christ!" groaned the listener, "can this thing be?"

A mocking laugh, like ice-drops ringing upon sounding metal, reminded him that his tormentor still lived, and with the red fury of a wounded lion shooting from his eye, he hissed:

"Curse you! The ground whereon you stand shall drink your blood. Take your choice, of the weapons."

"And stamp the last of the Castlemaynes a second Cain! So be it, *mon prince*! It is not the first time we have played with these ivory-handled toys," retorted the taunting devil incarnate, pacing off the ground.

"Stand back to back; count three, and turn at the word fire!" spoke Ernest, hoarse with savage impatience.

No sound save the gentle rustle of growing leaves broke the awful silence that then reigned, until St. Pierre's unshaken, mellifluous voice gave the count:

"One!—two!—three!—fire!"

Then a quick double report cleft the harmony of the soft spring air with sudden discord, and like the shooting of a star the Titan fell.

"*Tout est perdu, fors l'honneur!*"

With a smile such as Lucifer might have worn when gazing upon the desolated garden of Eden, St. Pierre approached the fallen man. Quiet and passionless enough he lay now among the purple crocuses, with the golden sunlight wrapping him in the sheeted glory of its royal colors. A crimson stream dabbled the short grasses, but the triumphant fiend by short examination, knew that his bullet had fallen so far short of its murderous intent that his victim would not die. Still there was satisfaction written upon his sardonic countenance as he daintily cleansed his slim white hands with a delicate cambric handkerchief, and murmured:

"The hirelings of Pharnabazus slew the Greek; but I save my honorable kinsman alive to suffer."

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE SERPENT'S COILS.

"—Unmerciful disaster

Follows close, and follows faster."

OUIDA CASTLEMAYNE had risen from her sick-bed a very different woman from the Ouida Castlemayne that left the shelter of her husband's roof, mad with outraged love and pride. Vainly Ernest whispered to himself as he languished pain distraught by the leaden philter of St. Pierre's hate: "She will come back to me when her anger has spent itself." So far from going back was she that she would have torn her tongue out rather than with it sue for pardon when she knew herself to have been the one injured.

It is a pleasant sophism that makes a woman's heart the only worldly tribunal where a man's transgressions are forgiven him the seventy and seventh time; nevertheless—it is a sophism.

There is a point beyond which the power of womanly forgiveness does not reach, and the truest, most conscientious soul that ever throbed finds a something within itself, uncontrollable, unappeasable, unchangeable, that wrenches from the heart the image that occupied its holy of holies; and when the will would reinstate the fallen hero, alas! the power to accomplish it is gone for aye.

Women who love well, love but once; and when the object of that love so forgets the jewel he wears as to pick a flaw in its rare gold setting, he picks a flaw that no jeweler in the wide world can mend—he brushes a bloom from off the apricot that no human power can replace, and henceforth shall blame himself that its most exquisite flavor is lost.

And—"He whom a woman once has loved can never be to her like other men."

Ouida was not made of the mettle that curls like a hound at the feet of its maltreater.

The mother-love, which sometimes softens, but more often hardens, the mother's heart toward the lips that have dared to cast a slurring doubt upon its paternity, had just escaped her; and she arose from fever-tortured sleep with a fierce regret at heart, and a burning desire to fill the weary hours with something that should strangle the gnawing memory of her desolation.

The desired nepenthe she had found in incessant study under the direction of that cadaverous mentor, Pastengon. After weeks of untiring application, she had at last made her debut as Portia in "The Merchant of Venice."

A critical audience had given her an encouraging reception, and the play was working smoothly. Now dressed as a doctor of law, she waited her call in the greenroom.

Pastengon was pacing up and down the apartment, playing in a fidgety way with his snuff-box, and looking like an animated exclamation point in an uncertain state of punctuation.

"This scene decides the question whether I am to be or not to be a success, uncle," said the debutante.

"Well, there is no reason why it should not be success. Bless my soul, I've seen people with half your genius make great successes. I hope you don't feel nervous?"

"On the contrary I feel as if I were Portia's

self, and eager as a prosecuting attorney to begin the case."

"No word of the text has escaped you?"

"No, uncle; 'I am informed thoroughly of the cause.'"

"The manager's Shylock is very hard on a debutante."

"Well, if the debutante make a blunder—then must the Jew be merciful."

"On what compulsion must I? tell me that," declaimed the old actor, catching her humor, and striking an attitude.

"The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed;
It blesses him that gives and him that takes;
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest. It becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown.
His scepter shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptered sway,
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show like God's
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this—
That, in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all
To render the deeds of mercy."

"Good! good!" applauded Pastengon, in a fervor of gratulation, throwing his snuff-box toward the fair Portia, missing her by a narrow chance, and sprinkling the call-boy freely in face and eyes with the pungent powder.

"Bless my soul! I forgot that the poor old snuff-box wasn't a bouquet. Ah, my bouquet days are past and gone!" apologetically exclaimed the old man, hasting in search of his precious dragon-fly.

"Dern the snuff! It's a bokay I wished had gone up Pastengon's old proboscis before he'd past it inter my eyes," muttered the call-boy, between sneezes, while Ouida escaped into the wings to await her cue.

"What's the matter?" demanded a smooth, persuasive voice, and a man, thin of lip and wily of eye, came in from the direction of the manager's box just as Pastengon retired, following in the wake of his pupil.

"Hell—ocution Pastengon!" answered the irate lad, rubbing the saline drops from his reddened eyes.

"Where is he?"

"There!" said the boy, jerking his thumb in the direction of the stage.

"Atch—tchezul seems to me I smell snuff. Boy, will you tell Mademoiselle Lola that the manager will send her home in his carriage, after the play?"

"Yes, mister, if I don't forget."

"There is something to help your memory. And tell Pastengon that the manager wants to see him in the office immediately after the curtain falls."

"Egg-zactly, mister."

"Confound the snuff! A man might sneeze his head off with half the dose. Atch—chtzee! I'll get out of this infernal hole. Atch—thneize!" and he of the thin lips and scintillating eyes beat a hasty retreat.

"Ef there's anything in phizermahogony, you'll get inter an infernal hole one of these fine days that ain't to be sneezed at, Mister Clubfoot, soliloquized the preter-sharp youth, and in turn left the besnuffed atmosphere.

Alas, poor Ouida! Her mother's name had proved but poor protection against so subtle an enemy as Emile St. Pierre. After weeks of unremitting search he had found the escaped quarry in the much-talked-of debutante, and with a quickness devils might have envied, he formed a plan to consummate his hate-born resolves.

Being one of the critical few who either "damn with faint praise" or make their approval the cordon of fashion to a new play or a dancer's ankles, and so on intimate terms with the manager of the theater, he had obtained admittance behind the curtain and so laid a train by which he hoped to spring a mine upon the woman already warped with double misfortune.

The curtain rung down upon the last scene, and twice Ouida responded to the tumultuous call of the enthusiastic audience. Her Portia had been a success, and something that feebly counterfeited joy swelled in her breast as she ran across the pavement from the stage entrance to the carriage awaiting her. The side lamps of the brougham were not lighted and the shutters were close drawn, but in the preoccupation of her mind Ouida did not notice this until the carriage was in motion and a faint closeness in the atmosphere impelled her to lower a window.

She leaned forward to put her thought in force, when a strong, firm grasp drew her back with silent suddenness; a quick, dextrous arm pinioned her hands helpless at her sides, and then a handkerchief was pressed tightly over her mouth and nose, and the deathly sweetness of chloroform stole all her frightened senses.

The mania for scientific investigation and discovery had so grown upon Emile St. Pierre that he had come to regard human life as little more than an alchemic problem. A second Dr. Faust in his desires to penetrate the secrets of creation and hold communion with them that are

"—Not like inhabitants of earth and yet are on it," he had devoted much time to the study of the black arts.

In the uppermost story of his house there was a room, octagonal in shape, draped from center-ceiling to floor with heavy folds of black velvet, wherein he worked out his half-insane fancies. All about this room were scattered the beloved results and appurtenances of his monomania. From the ceiling a golden censer was suspended, burning blue, and filling the apartment with a perfume as of Araby the blest. At one side a grinning, ghastly skeleton rattled its wired bones in horrid obedience to an electrical hand that held it in its place. A magnificent painting of the Headless Horseman hung opposite it, and a hideous satyr in bronze stood guard over the crucible wherein were mixing the subtle essences that were finally to produce the elusive elixir of life, near which a human heart glowed redly through the transparent prison of a glass jar.

A splendid magnetic battery occupied a marble trestle, and near it was a marvelous combination of polished steel, shining brass and unvarnished oak, that was at once a clock and a musical instrument. This was the offspring of St. Pierre's erratic inventive genius. The lower part of the nondescript was inclosed like an organ, while above arose fluted brass columns supporting the dial. Between the central two of these columns a round metallic plate rested upon a cylindrical spring; a chime of tiny bells, hung between each column, told the quarter and half-hours, but as the hands upon the dial marked the hours, a hammer descending struck this metal spheroid, causing, by the action of its spring, the organ to play a tune.

It was in this room Ouida found herself when consciousness returned, and the first object upon which her gaze rested was the man whom of all others she most feared and hated.

Struggling to arise she found herself bound tightly to a funereal throne-shaped chair in which she had been placed.

"It is useless to beat your wings, my bird; your cage is secure," said her abductor, beaming with hateful exultation.

"Why have you brought me here, Emile St. Pierre?"

"To make you happy, and gratify your curiosity to see what is within this Pandora's box, beautiful Ouida!"

"What do you intend to do with me?"

"Love you if you will be loved, if not, then kill you."

"Kill me then, you venomous abortion! Ten thousand deaths were better than your love."

"A woman's no is often changed to yes, sweet madame. Life is very-sweet and you are young."

"Yet old enough to die if so I 'scape dishonor."

"Dishonor is a thing of time, and love makes life a paradise while it lasts."

"Do you presume to call the mad infatuation that leads you to force a woman's inclination love? You know not what love is, sir! Release me, and let me go my way unmolested and your protestations would find some faint corroboration."

"Impossible, most charming of women! Violent means are sometimes necessary to insure peaceful ends—"

"If I woo you harshly
My temper is to blame for't."

For love of you I have turned traitor to my mother's memory, fostered passion where only fiercest hate should have reigned, and cursed myself for being what I am—a spawn of Satan. For love of you I could battle the world single-handed, dare the vengeance of heaven, or roast in hottest hell. I have staked all upon the turning of a die. Life is stale, flat, and unprofitable without you, and since you so will it we will quit the stage together and 'count the world well lost.'"

"You surely cannot mean to murder me! Have you no mercy?"

"Love me and my mercy shall be as infinite as the soul's existence."

"Never! I would not buy my life at such a price, were it possible to love a thing so mean."

"Very well, beauteous Ouida, then death it is. Do you see this little can? It contains nitro-glycerine enough to raise this house from its foundation. I'll place it just there where you saw the hammer, a half hour gone, strike. When next it falls the curtain falls with it upon our little drama of life. Listen! How silvery sweet those bells sound! They are our passing bells, *carol!* Does your heart fail you? Not Then, by all the powers of darkness, you are doomed. Yonder grinning skeleton is a fairer sight than you soon will be. How loudly the clock ticks. It measures swiftly our ebbing life-throbs. Ten minutes more of time is left to say prayers in. How tenderly will your fond husband cherish thy memory when he knows in what good company thou didst die!"

A slight swaying of the velvet drapery passed unnoticed by Emile St. Pierre as he faced and taunted the hapless victim of his infernal purpose.

Five minutes stretched their puny space between them and the falling of the hammer, but

"Man proposes and God disposes."

A boyish figure crept from under the velvet curtains, gathered a coil of bright brass wire in his cautious hand and with unerring aim—only possible to one of our Arab gamins—the almost imperceptible lasso circled for a second over St. Pierre's head and then fell, imprisoning the villain's arms in temporary helplessness.

"Throw that 'ere spontaneous combustion out the winder, perfessor, while I shock the cuss," piped the voice of Jake the call-boy, as he seized the handle of the battery to which the wire rope was attached.

"God bless my soul! A pretty time there'd been if we had been five minutes later," breathed Pastengon through his nose as he emerged from the sable drapery and lifted the can of death from its fatal resting-place. "I don't like such jokes, bless my soul if I do!" and depositing the can gingerly upon the floor he proceeded to unbind the poor pale prisoner, whose head had fallen on her breast.

"You'd better secure this chap first. I reckon every bone in his infernal body is cracked by this time."

"Right, Jake!" said Pastengon, turning in response to the boy's suggestion. "What is to be will be, and this proves it."

Round and round the foiled and writhing man they twisted the yellow wire, and when he was bound, past all danger of escape, Jake came round to view him.

"How is that, mister snake-in-the-grass?" he asked. "I smelt your little game when I see'd it wasn't the manager's brougham, so I jest jumped up behind for a free ride. Yer had too much on yer hands fer to lock the door, so I jest dropped off, piped a star back after

Pasty, and here we be! Unfort'nit for you, ain't it? Why, you ought to be grateful ter me for saving your life, but it ain't yer nater to. Ef yer don't take my advice and reform ye'll be stretching hemp, first thing you know."

St. Pierre glared at the boy with the malignity of a fiend, but answered him not, and Jake turned from the contemplation of the fallen foe to where Pastengon was mingling nasal condolence and execrations in a very confusing way and undoing the silken scarf that bound Ouida to the chair.

A strange, vacant, yet terrible look was on her face as she turned it to the light, and the old man urged on by a sudden fear, said:

"You are safe now, child. Come with me. There is no further cause for fear."

"Soft! The Jew shall have all justice—soft! no haste."

"Good Lord, perfessor, she thinks she is at the the-a-ter!" gasped Jake.

Pastengon shivered as if the mortal enemy had fastened upon his vitals, and for once, forgetting his favorite form of expression, exclaimed:

"The curse of the old duchess has fallen—she is mad!"

"Parted from herself and her fair reason"—

Oh, spirit of darkness, thou didst my bidding well!" hissed the bruised serpent as he watched them lead her away through the parted gloom of the black chamber.

CHAPTER XIII.

GOING HOME!

"The wild swan's death-hymn took the soul
Of that waste place with joy,

And the creeping mosses and clambering weeds,
And the willow branches, hoar and dank,
And the wavy swell of the sighing reeds,
And the wave-worn horns of the echoing bank,
And the silvery marsh-flowers, that throng
The desolate creeks and pools among,
Were flooded over with eddying song."

FAITHFULLY and tenderly did Pastengon and his daughter keep watch and ward over poor Ouida. Indeed, she gave them very little trouble, for the hour of terrible dread in the black-draped laboratory seemed to have blotted from her mind all memory—all will, and she sat in the sun through the bright summer days thridding, with restless fingers, the wavy masses of her hair—repeating and re-repeating the text of Portia as if conning a task, or singing softly that exquisite poem called "The Long, Weary Day."

Occasionally at the striking of the clock, or did she come in contact with anything black, her eyes would dilate as if in sudden terror, and she would start as if some giant hand had seized her; but these were only momentary gleams that, passing, left her in the same hopeless, harmless condition.

At the close of a warm and lovely day, the trio composing the ex-actor's family were seated together enjoying the quiet hour when nature holds her breath to hear the footsteps of the coming night. Ouida sat with listless folded hands by the west window, bathed in a pink flush, following the sun's passionate good-night, and singing, as was her custom—

"The lonely day at last
In pain and woe has passed.

"When I my window raise,
Upon the night to gaze,
And I am weeping,
While all are sleeping."

"Alas, poor lady!" said Meme; "if she only could weep, perchance it might lift the weight that darkens her sad mind."

"He often said to me,
When sad my heart would be,
For me some time shalt thou be weeping;
When I have left thee lone,
And far away have gone,
Shalt thou be weeping,
While all are sleeping."

sung the mournful voice, unconscious or unmindful of Meme's interruption.

"Where do you suppose her husband is all this time, father?"

"On the point of Satan's trident, if he is getting his just deserts for his dastardly treat-

ment of that poor child," replied Pastengon, wrathfully.

"Ah, father, the wrongs of woman rarely find redress in this world, except in plays and novels," philosophized Meme.

"Nevertheless, there is such a thing as retributive justice on earth. 'What is to be will be.'"

Again the mournful music struck tearful chords in the listeners' hearts:

"Oh, better far to me
Than silent death would be,
To live and mourn, his memory keeping,
For he might come again,
Upon his heart to strain,
And say, 'Thou art mine, love!
Oh, stay thy weeping.'"

"Meme!"

"What, father?"

"I have a great notion to write to her father. It is barely possible something might be done for her that we have not done, and, however fierce his anger may have been, her present condition would melt the heart of a stone. Bless my soul, it would!" and the old man brushed away a tear from his skinny cheek.

"I don't think it would be anything more than right to let her parents know how she is, but I fear me it would break her mother's heart to see her. Her singing makes me think of Lalla Rookh's, that was

"—Like the notes, half-ecstasy, half-pain,
The bulbul utters ere her soul departs."

Just listen how her voice wails through that song."

"Oh, Lord, my love is dead,
To Thee his soul has fled,
My heart and soul were in his keeping,
Ne'er shall I see him more,
For that I grieve so sore,
For that am weeping,
While all are sleeping."

The sunset glow faded into twilight gray; the evening star flashed and softened like a heavenly eye; the harvest moon shed chaste, cool smiles on the heated brow of earth, and peace, like a cooing dove, brooded over that homely little parlor in the old tenement-house. Alas, that change is inevitable!

That night when all slept the insane woman crept, with stealthy cunning, from beneath the roof that had given her such kindly shelter, out into the yellow moonlight.

Through the silent streets she fled like some swift shadow. Now dropping into the hiding of some doorway until the watchman passed—now running swiftly along the pavement, she reached the city suburbs, where the shrubbery of full-leaved gardens lent her friendly concealment.

Still on she ran, and, anon, the open country stretched out before her. Past sleeping villages and quiet farm-yards she fled until miles intervened between her and the city, and her feet, all unused to such cruel flittings, became unsteady. Then, creeping into a dense thicket of sapling birch and maples, she laid her weary head upon the soft green ferns and slept while little birds, waking to the sweet surprise of early day, plumed their feathers in silent wonder as they peeped from nest and branchlet at the invader, and then, seeing naught of menace in her deathlike repose, sung sweet lullabys above her leafy bed.

Six days came and were swallowed up in the vortex called yesterday, while yet Ouida wandered, and by some strange chance or providence she now approached the vicinity of her old mill-house home.

Distant stars shone dimly through the sheeted pallor of the moonlit night as she gained the silvery Mourning Kill, and looked adown its current to where the falls in double cascade leaped and tumbled in foam-white agony over the cruel rocks.

Above the falls the dark still waters of the pond glided soft and placid, bearing peace within its bosom, and the mill-house stood like a great black bat with motionless wings outspread, casting somber shadows over the mirrored heaven of water.

With weary step and slow the wanderer drew nearer the home from whence she had

flown in the innocent cloudless dawn of her life. Alas, how love had wrecked her!

A little boat in which she had passed many sunny hours of her happy girlhood, was moored upon the grassy bank of the pond, and mechanically the exhausted woman crept over the side and sunk upon its timeworn seat. With fever-distended eyes she looked out over the familiar scene, and as its influence permeated her shattered brain she began once more to sing a song that often her mother had sung when nestling the winsome baby-girl to sleep upon her breast.

The rippling waters rocked the little craft with eager lightness, but the singer heeded not that her weight had abetted the grasping waves. Slowly the lightsome bark parted from its anchorage and drifted with the strong and noiseless current, and still the thrilling notes of "Der Wanderer" pierced the midnight air. Nearer and nearer the falls she drifted, but neither fear nor consciousness robbed the music of its steady sweetness.

One quick whirl—one moment's halting upon the rocky brink, and the torrent lifted the cockle-shell in its giant arms, and boat and burden were lost in the roaring, seething chasm, while echoing back from wood and hill there came

"A spirit whisper, 'Exile, come
To thine own land, and to thy tomb.'"

CHAPTER XIV.

SIC TRANSIT!

"Fold thy palms across thy breast;
Fold thine arms, turn to thy rest,
Let them ravel!"

Just where the groaning willow, across which young love had lightly leaped to kiss the tender lips of Ouida of the mill, spanned the sighing Mourning Kill, a woman's face lay among the waving water-grasses shining white-ly as the marble features of some fallen Niobe. One slender arm clasped the old log with the tenacious clasp of rigid unconsciousness—her long, bright hair floated upon the water like tangles of gold-thread torn from its earth-warm bed, and two white feet cleft the limpid element with the pinky pallor of pond-lilies.

Over the swaying form the old butternut tree cast leafy shadows, and the boughs bent in vain endeavor to raise the body from its watery crypt. The south wind tossed dewy tears from the opening eyes of the tall white daisies, and the robins flew low over the rippling stream, like minor strains of sweetest music borne on wings.

Along the sinuous grassgrown path leading from her home in the willow copse to the mill came "This world's Polly," singing and soliloquizing after her characteristic fashion.

She was intent upon gathering certain roots of rare medicinal qualities that grew along the margin of the sad-voiced creek, and carried a basket half-filled with odorous plants, and a staff, hook-shaped at one end, with which she fished some of her trophies from their native path.

"This is the wickedest world I ever expect to see till the dying day of my death. Fee-fi-fo-fum, cut off the head of Christopher Columbus with the sharp edge of an illuminated cotton-bale; Napoleon Bonaparte has gone to glory in a patch-work quilt made of forty-four thousand and a half-pieces of bass-wood bees-wax; the man in the moon has been fatally injured by the explosion of a cabbage-head, and the king of the Cannibal Islands has gone up in a balloon with ten thousand porous plasters and a small black-bottle of hair invigorator. I never did see such times in this world, no, never!

"Ha, ha, my boy, I've got you fast at last," at which burst of song the singular creature flourished triumphantly a long scraggy piece of crinkle-root that she had after much tugging and twisting succeeded in wresting from the soft moist soil.

"Land o' Goshen! I never expect to get into another such world, no, never—not if I live till the dying day of my death! Why,

they do say that Queen Esther has run away with the Grand Turk, while Mordecai sat at the king's gate holding a battering-ram by the horns, but I never heard of anybody wanting a Turk before in this world, no, never! A Turk ain't a turkey, and a turkey never was a goose in this world, no, never, so it couldn't have been Queen Esther that run away with my goose that the parson give me and that I wasn't never a-going to cook in this world, no, never, but keep to the dying day of my death to remember the parson by. I wonder what Methuselah would say if pretty Polly was ever to die in this world and they put a white cap on her head and put her in a long box with the back breadth cut out of her dress!

"Methuselah was such a big boy—tall as the church steeple and his beard trailed three miles on the ground, but, that was as much as three hundred and sixty-five years ago, and I'll never see the like again in this world, no, never!

"Oh, where, oh, where has my old goose gone?
Oh, where, oh, where is she?"

That ain't her in the creek is it? No, that ain't a goose—that is a ghost!"

Polly had caught the reflection of the white human face through the rippling wavelets eddying around the piteous obstruction. She dropped her basket, and walked with steadiest deliberation toward the spectral figure lying in such awful quiet against the vivid green of the floating grasses.

"I never expected to see a ghost in this world, no, never, and if I live to the dying day of my death, I hope I won't see another, no, never! It ain't Christian to drown ghosts in this world, no, never!" said Polly, as by dint of hooking and pulling she dragged the dripping, inanimate body out upon the flower-decked greensward beneath the cathedral arches of the giant butternut.

"It can't be a ghost, because ghosts ain't never alive in this world, no, never. It ain't a goose, nor a teapot, and I'd never have any use for it if I lived to the dying day of my death. I'll go and get that white devil to blow a little breath in its mouth, and see if it won't open its eyes once more in this world!" and away Polly hobbled toward the distant roaring mill singing

"We'll talk about mildews and blights,
And we'll all be unhappy together."

"Can this be death? there's bloom upon her cheek,
But now I see it is no living hue,
But a strange hectic—like the unnatural red
Which autumn plants upon the perished leaf.
It is the same! Oh, God! that I should dread
To look upon the same."

The last red splendor of the afternoon sun reddened the white stones of the old mill, and struck a glory of light from the windows of the vine-embowered house as we approach it for our last look within its familiar walls before the curtain falls upon a tale that is told.

The little parlor, with all its time-worn and incongruous appointments, appears much the same as on the sunshiny morning when an empty chamber wrought sorrow and desolation in the hearts of both just and unjust, except that it is unoccupied, and from the open door of that little chamber come sounds of grief smothered in their utterance.

Within the little room no change has laid its unfamiliar finger upon the slightest evidence of the bygone happy girlhood that once made its low walls echo with life and song. Still great change is there, for on the snow-white bed a woman, murdered by the divinely appointed supremacy of man, lay passing into the valley where

"Death—and after death great darkness—" waits.

The dying girl was strangely like the Ouida of other days as she reclined, her head raised high upon bolstering pillows. Her hair glistening and spray-like laid in golden masses about her head and face; a hectic flush disguised the pain-wrought hollows in her cheeks; her temples were like polished marble—death-veined—and a supernatural light had gathered over the film that precedes death in the wide

blue eyes. Pale hands lay passively at her side, and the snowy breast, partially uncovered, rose and fell with fainter and still fainter growing respirations.

The miller sat by the woodbine shaded window with bowed head, and agonies of grief and remorse convulsing the iron frame. At one side of the bed the mother knelt, watching the life of her darling fade out, with all the anguish of a mother's riven heart draining the fountain of tears; opposite her was Ernest—Ernest, aged and emaciated almost beyond belief in the past few months, but still the Ernest who had won and wounded unto death the heart that now throbbed so feebly beneath his hand. No tears came to his relief; only great dry sobs told how deep his sorrow touched, and his lips were set with the rigid pallor of despair.

The miller approached the bed, all differences forgotten in that dread hour, and in the strong yearning of his spirit cried:

"Daughter!"

She smiled as if her soul was going out in the light, and answered faintly:

"Yes, father, it is all right now!"

Then for a moment she lay as listening for some far-off calling voice, and with another smile felt feebly for her mother's hand.

"Don't stay long after I go, mother; Ouida wants you!"

A low wail parted the mother's lips as she kissed again and again the fair child-brow upon which the death dews were gathering.

"Raise me higher, Ernest; the day is fading."

Another smile illuminated with seraphic light her countenance, and with sudden energy she raised her lips to the tremulous face bending above her, and fell back into his encircling arms with a long sigh as of release—dead!

"'Tis the curse of the sins of the fathers visited upon the children from generation to generation!" groaned the miller, and the sun set behind the western hills leaving gray gloom and night-born tears to earth.

The old mill is fast falling into decay. The water-wheel no longer beats with steady paddle the falling torrents of the moss-grown race; only the rank luxuriance of clambering vine, and the glistening web of the busy spider indicate aught of life left to the echoing, deserted house.

On a little grassy knoll, rising just back of the old butternut tree, there are three graves overrun with dark green cypress. A broken marble shaft above them bears this simple legend, "Requiescat in Pace!" and here lies all that was mortal of Hugh Haughton, his sad-eyed wife, and hapless, beautiful Ouida.

The earth lies tenderly upon their pulseless breasts; the gray light of heaven falls gently over their resting-place; at morn and eve cool-winged zephyrs love to linger there; sweet-voiced birds sing requiems from the swaying butternut boughs, and the Mourning Kill flows by with ceaseless sigh and dirge.

Here must we leave them whispering hopefully to the infinite to come:

"Resurgent!"

"This world's Polly" still lives in the willow copse, refusing to be comforted for the loss of the goose that she "never expects to see again in this world, no, never," and keeping jealous watch and ward over her precious collection of tea-pots, which she still insists she shall do "to the dying day of her death."

Emile St. Pierre died as the fool dieth, in his sable-draped laboratory, strangled by the noxious gases arising from the impious experiments by which he strove to wrest the power of endless life from the hand of Deity.

And Ernest Castlemayne still walks beneath the kindling eye of day, for—

"Men have died, and worms have eaten them,
But not for love—"

THE END.

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